

Argus 2018



Language

LANGUAGE

ARGUS 2018



The Story of Argus

According to Greek mythology, Argus was a giant with one hundred eyes. While some of his eyes "slept," he kept watch with the others. Hermes lulled Argus to sleep with his magic lyre and slew him with a stone. Upon finding the dead Argus, Hera, queen of the Gods, placed his eyes in the tail of a peacock. The cover of Argus traditionally represents this ancient legend handed down to us by the Greeks. The title was chosen to represent the different views and opinions of readers as though each perspective were an eye of the peacock.

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Assistant Editor

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Assistant Editor

Acknowledgments

The Argus staff would like to extend a warm thanks to our judges this year: Vanessa Velez (Fine Art), Alfonso Briseño (Photography), Jacob Hammer (Poetry), Clint Peters (Nonfiction), Frisco Edwards (Fiction). They chose exceptionally well, and their efforts are greatly appreciated.

We would also like to acknowledge our advisors, Dr. J. Andrew Briseño and Dr. Rebecca Macijeski. With this being her first year as our advisor, Dr. Macijeski provided unwavering support and determination for this edition. With the guidance of both Dr. Briseño and Dr. Macijeski, this year's edition of the magazine is one that our predecessors and successors alike will be proud of.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge the previous Editors-in-Chief as well for paving the way for each edition to build upon the last. We would like to express our sincerest gratitude to Maggie Harris, the previous Editor-in-Chief of Argus, for offering her wisdom and mentorship throughout the year.

Editor's Notes

The inspiration for Language came to me when I was trying to find a way to sum up what makes us all so unique and yet connects us at the same time. Language is something that all humans share, but it is a reflection of our culture, which means we all speak a different one. Our language reflects where we were born, how we were raised, what interested us as children, what we found fascinating as adults, how we interact with others, and how we see the world.

I believe that every piece in this edition reflects the author's language through the experience detailed and how that particular author chose to present it. Some of our pieces are loud and jump out at the reader, while others are subtle and sneak up on us. Some are young and inspiring, while others are wise from years of experience. Some are pain. Some are love. Some we will never forget. However, all of them reflect an emotion described in a way only that author can. In this way, Argus is a collection of languages from many different voices and backgrounds and truly lives up to our motto "Art from all, for all."

Katie Rayburn

Contest Winners

Poetry:

- 1st place - Cleanse / Allie Atkinson
- 2nd place - The Good Walmart Sweater / Maggie Harris
- 3rd place - Color Me In / Nicholas Jones

Fiction:

- 1st place - The Heart Tailor / Casey Alfultis
- 2nd place - The Garden of Portraits / Maggie Harris
- 3rd place - Procrastination and Imagination / Skylar Guidroz
- Honorable Mention - Old New Mexico Blues / Ruben E. Smith

Non-Fiction:

- 1st place - Fifteen Minutes with Freaks for Jesus and the Snake Lady / Bruce Craft
- 2nd place - Good Old Saint Expedite / Christian Frost
- 3rd place - Now You're Speaking My Language / Ashante Knox
- Honorable Mention - Why My Son Won't Eat With Me... / Bruce Craft

Photography:

- 1st place - Air Show / Sean McGraw
- 2nd place - The Beach is Calling / Kailey Wisthoff
- 3rd place - darks and lights / Emilee Landry
- Staff Pick - The Sea Speaks / Alexis Trosclair

Fine Arts:

- 1st place - Winding Road / Laura Scronce
- 2nd place - Yin and Yang / Ariel Bailey
- 3rd place - The Mighty Kraken / Maddie Manuel
- Staff Pick - Sea Dragon / Ariel Bailey

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Memories

Dakota Newman

The lines of poetry write themselves
Like the lines of time
Spreading over the page
by ink stained fingers
Producing a blackened image
Filled with the figure
Of Hindsight
In all her glory.

Hindsight desperately clings
To the memories Time
Has afforded her to see
Through rose colored glasses
Obscuring reality.

She mourns for the life
Tainted by faded memories
Jaded by the grass that
Is greener on the other
Side of fantasies.
Hindsight is clothed in the dreams
Of her youth and chained by the
Desperate need to succeed.

She is always haunted by the dreams
That were kidnapped and killed by reality.

Orpheus

Julian Guerrero

The voice came down with ample sound
in language old, and strong.

To mortal ears it sung, so dear,
its mesmerizing song.

The charm and sound that man here found
was prime and utter joy,
that made its way, amidst the fray,
from ear, to heart, to soul.

The years did pass, and fortune, crass,
beheld not man for long.
And common man, below the sand,
forgot its ancient tongue.

The moon did fall, and man's last call,
in sorrow, claimed his love,
that never rose, and life, morose,
slept forevermore.

Yet time ceased not, as man forgot,
once more, its ancient age.
A constant wail, like wind on sails,
declared the mortal's rage.
And there remained no love, for vane,
no heart was ever strong.
And every word became a sword

that fought against the song.

That man of old had loved, and cold,
his heart grew deaf as now.
Through death most foul, that blackest cowl,
defiler of love's vows.

That once were near, yet now, through fear,
seemed distant. Almost gone.
Yet here remains, small and frail,
and grasping hope so strong,
that beckons all, in softest call,
"With me the heart lives on."

Belonging

Alison Mitchell

She sits mesmerized and wonders where she belongs.

Is it to the North where a winding, starry path atop a hill awaits her? Up there, Athena's olives mingle with sculpted marble. If she turns East, she'll find people jostling through the streets in search of cuisine or trinkets. South leads to guards wearing uniforms of brown pleated skirts, guarding an unmarked tomb.

And yet West leads to puppeteers and bands performing in the streets, where she might be persuaded to leave behind a coin.

Each path leads to something new

and yet she exists both in the past and present, as one.

She is, in essence, a life amid the ruins.

Sunday Midnight

Robyn Beatty

As the sun leaves the earth,
the moon appears with a glorious shine
to light the darkest shadows of the night.
A new day appears to the nocturnal creatures,
while time is recycled, the creatures come out
to crawl. Nothing has changed
as the darkest part of the night settles in.
the trees sign, the sky dances, and the brisk air
howls-
all while the moonlight ascends, Sunday Midnight
begins to dull. Another night passes, all is bright once again.

Mainstream Conversation

Brandy Ranel

Words have power.

This is true

Sticks and stones can crush your bones

but, Words will forever haunt you

The Art of Communication

Starts with a sound

Can you hear me now?

Don't speak!

Unless, I agree with what you're saying

There is no explaining

Difference in opinion

has been deemed hate

Use freedom of speech

Gives us the right to delineate your fate

Knowledge is power.

Oh, but Language what a tangled web you weave

Potential to be devoured or

To do the devouring

What will you choose?

Think wisely, for with

Language

"Tis always a loser

And a winner.

The Good Walmart Sweater

2nd Place

Maggie Harris

"Old coats and old friends are the same things." - Victor Hugo

I was there to ward away the cold,

The cold that came from inside when he crumpled your carefully written note.

I was there to keep you dry in the deluge,

The deluge of tears that fell when at last her eyes fluttered closed.

I was there to hide your pit stains,

The stains that had discolored the shirts your sister had passed down.

My cuffs were stained with the blood,

The blood of the popped pimple you discreetly wiped away.

My zipper was perpetually stuck, the lines bent inside,

The lines you had run the zipper up and down to keep the panic at bay.

My hood was never big enough to be cool.

My sleeves were never worn enough to be fashionable.

My sparkling letters never faded enough to be quaint.

My problem wasn't lack of sincerity, in the loyal way I clung to you.

I was frustratingly plagued by a perpetual sameness, an embarrassing mediocrity.

My price tag didn't put me with the popular kids,

Whose varsity jackets were clean and fitted.

My price tag didn't put me with the cool kids,

Whose leather jackets were weathered and loose.

Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister, Hot Topic

These jackets smelled like cologne

Aeropostale, Pink, Justice

These jackets smelled like perfume

We smelled like dollar store soap

My embrace was never ill fitting,

Yet you discarded me the first chance you got.

I remember your mom's protest, "But it's still in good shape!"

You shrugged me off with, "I never liked it anyway."

Now I lay in a heap,

Bare and stripped, wondering,

What good does it do a sweater,

To be a good sweater?

I Don't Speak Spanish

Katie Rayburn

I got a few words for you
In perhaps a vocabulary entirely new
To you, but not to me,
Not to the hundreds of people who sleep
On borrowed time, borrowed lives
That can't rest, can't breathe,
Because the air they breathe
Is poisoned by a created hatred
And the vilification
Of an entire group, jumping through hoops,
Trying to begin anew, and you—
You just don't speak their language.
But that's fair, because neither do I.
I don't speak puertorriqueña o dominicano—
Cubano, mexicano, o columbiano—
Salvadoreña o uruguaya—
Venezolano o paraguaya.
I speak a Spanish created en Estados Unidos
That commercially celebrates Cinco de Mayo and
Wears Dia de los Muertos as a costume.
What would it cost you?
To look around you
And see the people just like you—
Just like us—
Struggling to survive and thrive
In this grand nation,
Once a large piece of theirs,
This Land of the Free.
I was welcomed here,
So why can't they be?

In Calypso's Den

Katharyn Hebert

You enter
My room, my thoughts, me
Despite the day drawing closed
Despite the time passing all too quick

My body ached for you
It still does in these small hours
Our bodies glued together
Is still not close enough

My mind is drawn and quartered
Because of your being stretched over me
Like you're trying to block out the sun
Please block out the sun

A snake curled around the quiver
I can't tell who is who anymore
An extension of self
There is no end or beginning

How did you get here?
It seems all too perfect
A man right in front of me
You are like a god

You say you have to leave
I understand, but at the same time I don't
You say you have to leave
And I let you

I have no choice
But how will I know you'll be back?
You leave me a mess I don't know how to clean up
But I know you will be back to make a perfect mess of me once more

Save The Child

Nicholas Jones

Save the child of the refugee,
The child of the weak and weary,
The child of those,
Who walk dirt roads,
In search of food - of shelter,
A palace in which to feast,

Save the child of the immigrant,
Of the poor - and disabled - and hurt,
Let his love fall from above,
On those who need it most,
Harmonize the hues of reds with blues,
And let tomorrow hold prosperity,

Save the child of the broken,
Those souls that can't find light,
That went out once too late one night,
And never came back - or couldn't,
Or wouldn't if given the chance,

Save the child of the system,
The one lost in translation,
That couldn't speak above a whisper,
If they were screaming in a crowd,
Give them room to grow,
Save the child - the one that can't speak,
The one that screams "I need you" beneath,

Scars and a broken heart,
Falling apart - because they can't come to terms,
With who they really are - who they were born to be,

Save the children that walk amongst you,
In sadness - in silence - in Syria - in America,
The ones that live and breathe,
Save them before they fall away,
Hold them - keep them from harm's way,

And save the mother,
Her choice to make - and hers alone,
To protect the child from the ways of the world,
Or spare its suffering for its own sake,

In a world where bombs fall from atomic skies,
And their children die before their very eyes,
Ask yourself - is she to blame,
Or are you?

Mother and Daughter

Ruben E. Smith

The mother read to the child,
And long they sat there awhile.
A book about an imaginary place,
But the girl had a smile on her face.

The mother's voice held such love,
With words like brillig and borogoves.
The girl listened with anticipation,
As if she had been to this far off land.

The mother read to her daughter,
Carried her to a land of laughter
With a cat and a crazed hatter.
And there was no other chatter.

The daughter took her gaze up,
The mother looked upon her pup.
The girl opened her mouth, slack,
And said, "Mother, take me back."

With much debate and consideration,
The mother resisted a question:
"In due time, the times will end,
And you'll be taken back again."

The child had a look of confusion,
And her mother made no allusion;
She waited for the next question,
Giving the child undivided attention.

"When will tomorrow end," asked she.
The solemn mother replied, "Oh, me.
It'll end in its due time, my dear.
It could have ended yesterday, I fear."

"Yesterday had gone by, mother."
The mother scolded the daughter:
"Hush now, I hear yesterday coming.
Let's get back to our galumphing."

The mother read to her small child,
And long they sat there awhile.
Talk of a magical place and friends,
The mother continued until the end.

Share a Moment with Me

Dakota Newman

When I say I have anxiety,
I don't just mean that I get really worried.
It's not the kind where you can push my hair back
and murmur soft words, then everything is magically alright.

When I say I have anxiety,
I mean my anxiety makes me peel my skin off.
In fact, I don't what I'm doing until there is blood or pain.
Whichever come first, my mind doesn't discriminate,
until I've stripped layer after layer off of my own skin in my brain's
desperate attempt to calm itself, to distract itself, to feel something
other than that impending sense of doom.

When I say I have anxiety,
I mean I rip open my own flesh, in an attempt to let my racing thoughts
pour out with the blood I shed, drop by drop.

When I say I have anxiety,
I mean I give myself migraines
because I can't handle the weight of my thoughts anymore.
Each thought feels like a wrecking ball hitting the walls of my membrane,

Sending the building blocks of my sanity tumbling across my psyche.

To clarify, my mind is trying to rip itself out of my body,

One thought at a time.

My anxiety makes me inevitably scarred and violently ill,
I find myself peeling off my own skin strip by strip or battering
my mind into a bludgeoned mess.

Finally, I am left banging on the door of my mind in an attempt to escape reality.

Rose Garden

Allie Atkinson

Passion lingered between us
Anxious to sink its teeth in.
All we had to do was stop resisting...
I had grown weary with life,
And began to accept strife.
Trouble always followed your name
And I love to play games.
The sunlight kisses me good morning,
And your palms radiate warmth.
Your hesitant touches make me feel older, somehow at ease.
I am pleased to feel this,
But I am careful not to brush the roses.
I tried to grip unspoken words
That played in my mind to my day dreams' tunes.
But you didn't want me to know you.
So I danced around the topics, hoping you'd take my hand,
But you left me without a partner, so here I stand—remembering.
Remembering how I strolled through the rose garden,
Looking for an opening where the roses parted
Begging me to come forth.
But I was pricked by the thorns.
And yet I persisted
Because I've learned to love the sight of my own blood.

Gala

Kailey Wisthoff

Eight people on the floor, brushes to their faces

Twenty people in the seats, phones in the faces

Everyone is carrying a melody in their mind and out loud

Warming up and getting ready, preparation

"Less than twenty minutes until Go", "Thank you"

Butterflies are growing throughout everyone's stomachs

Thoughts of the performance to come, knowing that it'll be perfect

Especially for our biggest critics, kids

If the kids look bored then we failed, we cannot fail

"Places everyone", reminding ourselves that we need to smile

Act engaged with each other but more importantly with the audience

Make it feel like a party, dear god please don't look bored

Curtain going up, hoping everyone is doing what they are supposed to

If they don't, oh boy we will all hear about it

Smile, interact, smile, interact, be happy and engaged

Run off stage, run back on, look engaged and be happy

I don't remember it, I hope I sang the right notes

Curtain is falling, it is too late to remember now

Pushing off the stage, must get set for the next song

Waiting, anticipating the next time I go on
How much longer? I have been sitting here forever
Twiddling thumbs, keeping our voices warm
“15 minutes until Drummer Boy” “Thank you”
Thank god we don’t have to stand here anymore, excitement
Going through the performance in my mind, you’ve done it before you can do it again
This is the fourth performance, why are you still nervous?

“Places everyone”, getting set back stage is always nerve wracking
Gotta make sure no one in the audience can see me, be quiet
Watch the show and remember your cue
Watch the other sing to see when they enter, hope it isn’t too early or too late

Don’t move for this one, this is serious and we want them to watch the video
You can do it, just be the complete opposite of before
Look at the crowd not just one spot, include everyone you can

Move up, the back curtain is coming in
Don’t look bored while you wait for the next song, smile
Time to be happy again, smile and engage
The music starts, we begin and before we know it the show is over
Five down, five more to go.

Neon Music

Jordan Molitor

Neon lights, vibrant and pulsing
Music, loud and colorful
The Universe, vast and beautiful
You, lovely and perfect

In each sound I hear there's a color,
A beautiful flowing color,
And somehow it always reminds me
Of You in a way

Every light blue that flows through
Is Your laugh at a dorky joke

Every pink that twinkles in my ear
Is Your voice when You flirt

Every green that is seen in my head
Is Your voice when You get upset about work

Every yellow that comes just to go
Is Your claim that you can't be tickled
[and my persistence on it]
Every teal that leaves me reeling
Is Your assurance and comforting
Every purple, god how I love them,
Is Your voice when You say 'I love you'
I love You, and all of Your neon
Colors and musical smiles

I love how vast and beautiful You are,
You don't measure up to the Universe
Because You surpass it.

Mais sha, Don't Go Down to the Bayou

Skylar Guidrdoz

Eyes rolled up
black and yellow--
hazel shifting
with deceptive
innocence.
Blinking time
colors changed
olive
slipping into silted waters
muddy murkiness.

Teeth sharpened on bone and limbs stretch
Curved taloned toes imprinted
red clouds--
swirl on a shifting sparkling sky
eyes still innocent.

Swim with them?
I did--
Absorbed mud and blood
searched for lost hope
as serrated traps
refused
to snap.

Sit Still

Dakota Newman

Slowly slipping, sliding down the wall
Solemnly sinking, shackled to my regret
Staying still, suddenly on the floor
Sleek shinning, surprise beginning to show
Shame seeping, swimming through my veins
Starving serotonin, sick in the head
Stale sentiments, sedate my emotions
Suffering separates, silent tears fall undisguised
Stealing sober sentience as thoughts diminish
Somehow stormy seasons will fade eventually
Staying sane, sometimes requires not holding onto that which
is dead

Apocalyptic

Joy Newman

If the sun exploded right now,
If it collapsed upon itself
In a flaming mass of burning gases,
If 93 million miles away
Our star finally burned up
And died out, like countless stars
Have done before it,
It would take eight minutes
For us to realize what happened.
We would have eight minutes of bliss
Before our world collapsed,
Before everything we knew and cherished
Was consumed by flames.

If I am the radiant sun in your life,
As you seem to think I am,
Then, my love, you should know
That our eight minutes is running out.

Atomic Sky

Nicholas Jones

It was instantaneous - almost,
No time to say goodbye,
Before darkness fell upon the face of the earth,
And all of her children died,
It was instantaneous - almost,

The sirens blared and people ran from left and right,
I saw a child left alone - crying on the streets,
His mother nowhere to be found,
And his father fallen beneath a heap of debris,
His tears fell on deaf ears,
It was chaos,
I could not save them all - nor did I try,
Because what is real anymore,
When everything around you dies,
So I spent my last few minutes,
Trying to find you,

I can't recall if I did or not,
Find you - that is,
When everything was blown to bits,
But I hope you know - wherever you are,
I took my last breath hoping you'd be the one to catch it,
I took my last step hoping it was in your direction,
When the bombs went off - you went through my mind,

For the very last time - but most certainly not the first,
You were my favorite person - far from the worst,
And above all else - I hope it didn't hurt you,
I hope you didn't fall from grace,
I hope you didn't die alone,
And I hope I held a place in your heart,
Before the world fell apart,
Before it ripped at the seams,
I hope that I ran through your dreams,
At least one more time,
Before time ran through us all,

I pray that I will find you,
In the clouds or in the air,
And I hope that we will meet again,
When the atomic sky takes us there,
I pray that in another lifetime,
Between there and anywhere,
I'll find yours and you'll find mine,
Where the sun breaks through the atomic sky.

Stranger

Allie Atkinson

Times have changed, but you haven't,
Lavishing in outdated ideals
Seeing one angle in a square room
One color in a kaleidoscope.

Memories waft in with your favorite dessert.
I place flowers at the center of the table,
And I'm reminded of how they would die.

Petals will fall, shriveled,
Reminding me of your hands
As you'd descend into the bath water
Baptism.

Cleanse yourself of..
Regrets of the notion that you may be changing
Or perhaps that you're not.
Times have changed and so have you.
You told false stories to fill a silence,
A silence you once relished in

My hands are no longer prunes
And I—
I am a stranger.

To

Dakota Newman

The first time
you almost said
you loved me
was a mistake.

I could tell
by the curve
of your lips
and the halting
of your tongue
that you didn't
mean for the
beginning of that
phrase to slip
from your mouth.

You caught the
“I love you”
by the scruff
of its neck
and pulled it
back to you
keeping it caged
against your chest
as much as
against your lips.

You knew that
you couldn't afford
to let that
statement be set
free when neither
of us were

ready for the
caged bird's song.

You weren't prepared
for that kind
of dedication to
be breathed and
then given life
to while we
were unsure of
the life ahead.

You knew that
we couldn't contain
such a weighted
phrase as it
loomed over us
like an elephant
in the room.

You never finished
saying "I love
you" but my
quiet response to
your halted declaration
was uttered in
the recesses of
my distant mind.

I simply replied
"I love you
too" and I
almost wish that
you knew that
too.

Human Rules

Jordan Molitor

Time is a human construct
That actually exists.

Our perception of time is
The pseudo definition of it.

Time exists as a circle.
Everything is always happening and will continue to always happen for always.

We as humans,
Can only see
The one way
That time moves
For us humans.

We as humans,
Only exist as
Three dimensional creatures
That experience time
In one direction.
But time doesn't follow that path.

Time flows in our minds.
But time exists in our souls.

We as souls,
Exist in whatever dimension
That we as souls choose to exist in
Whatever

That may be.

We as souls, don't
Give
A shit
About the rules of time or really
Of anything at all.
Because,

We as souls, exist in that constant loop of
Time
That never ever ever ever ever ever ever
Ever
Stops moving because it's always
Always always
Happening at always time.

But
We as humans,
Must stay put
In our order.
In our existence.
In our space.

We as humans,
Must stay put
In our linear
Flow of time
As it moves.
Only forward.

So They Say

Julian C. Guerrero

I heard, but I could not see,
What is known to all except me.
When they tell me of it, I say,
that it's odd, as a summer in May.

They tell me that they know it well.
That it has never left, so they tell.
Yet I wonder if that is the truth,
for I see not the tree nor its fruit.

It is sweet, and warm to the touch,
for its heart, though small, does beat much.
Its color is crimson or green,
and it hides rather well in what's seen.

In the evenings, it whispers of rose,
and it rests in delicate pose.
In the mornings, it wakes with the dawn,
and it makes the most joyful of sounds.

They tell me it feels like the sea,
when the waves of old Galilee
can find not a rest through the night,
and the morning awakes them in fright.

They tell me it has a grand name,
though many do not think the same.
So simple, and yet so complex,
that many wise men it has vexed.

I hear, from the simple and vane,
that it only brings sorrow and pain.
And from those that do hold it, I hear,
that its sorrows one never must fear.

They tell me its taste is of wine,
from Rome, or from longing Milan.
And they say that its flavor is gold,
for one sip is enough to want more.

They tell me it sounds like the breeze,
that in dances with joy o'er the seas.
That its sound is one to adore,
like a siren from distant Greek shore.

They say that it moves like the clouds,
as it calls to all hearts, meek or proud;
that it knows how to dance to each tune
with the haste of a cold winter's moon.

They say all of this and much more
of that which I now can perceive in true form,
yet they do not know the full truth,
for I know what it is, it is you.

TNT

Nicholas Jones

My generation is a complex one,
One that doesn't fit the needs,
Of the society it feeds,
We're explosive - like TNT,

We chase whatever high we find,
We forget to go to class on time,
We fall in love with booze and drugs,
We have sixteen different plugs,
We stay up late to fail a test,
We literally cannot afford to rest,
We binge on technology,
But forget to eat,
We move at record-breaking speeds,
But forget to sleep,

We pull out loans we can't pay back,
We pull out all the stops - but stop dead in our tracks,
We pretend we have something better to do,
When all we do is sit in rooms,
And talk about people we've been with,
Or the things we've done - or would do,
If given the chance again,
We cry and beg and plead and bore,
We don't know what the hell we're doing anymore,

We go off in different places but crave direction,
We don't want love but we crave affection,
We want what's bad and neglect what's good,
Then say we want nothing more than to be understood,
We do the worst and expect the best,
We want the good shit - fuck the rest,

But regardless of our schematic ways,
The way we think or the way we were raised,
One thing unites us all:
We see the world for what it is,
And fight for what it's not,
We seek comfort in each other,
And from each other - we find a lot.

Loud Cajun Voices

Jordan Durio

I get shushed a lot

I'm talking too loudly

Too animatedly

Too passionately

I can't help it.

I come from a long line of

Loud Cajun Voices

I get shushed a lot.

I'm too opinionated,

Too hard-headed,

Too young to know what I'm talking about.

I can't help it.

I come from a long line of

Loud Cajun Voices

We fight a lot.

We have too much in common,

Too much hurt between us

Too many unspoken feelings

We can't help it.

We come from a long line of

Loud Cajun Voices

And we don't know how to tone it down

Thank You

Katharyn Hebert

Waking up, I see the sun shining through my window

It seems to be shining a little brighter today

Just for me?

Maybe

I walk down the paved walkway

Moving a little faster than usual

A certain spring in my step

I arrive in record time, not even tired

An existential crisis is just fine with me

I embrace it with open ribs and arms

My fingers reach toward a possibility

Of a happier today and tomorrow

The air is sweeter, despite the poison

The breath in my lungs is a revival

Despite the storm clouds

My limbs feel infinite

Thank you

Popeyes

Dakota Newman

I smell like Popeyes and too many nights of exhaustion.

I feel a blunt short of a high and six beers too drunk.

Which equals seven days past my tolerance level.

I look as if someone painted bad 70s eyeshadow under my eyes and thought

Casper would be a good reference for my skin.

I sound like cracked leather and a scratching post.

Which now appears to be something the cat dragged in.

I smell like sawdust and early mornings.

I feel like I've been soaked in grease and than left out in the sun.

Which boiled down, is a combination of a painting by Dali and Munch.

I look as if I was a character in the Corpse Bride and Tim Burton created me.

I sound like crushing dried flowers and squeaky bed springs.

Which would be perfect for a silent movie.

I'm still a blunt short of a high and six beers too drunk.

But now it adds up to seven days past my level of sanity.

Cleanse

1st Place

Allie Atkinson

Explain to me how I miss the feeling of being touched,
But I don't want to see my hands dirty.
My body is an empty, echoing cave
Cooing to lure someone in,
But any disturbance is unwelcomed.
Any trace is scrubbed from the stone.
Remain as you are
Remain as you were,
A repetitive broken record.
Evidence of how I sleep at night.
I pick and pick at the crust of you beneath my nails,
Washing away any reminder of you.
Because the memories with you
Are more like disoriented nightmares
Where I wander in a haze,
A wonderland that I don't want to get lost in,
And I didn't need a potion to make me feel small.
A state of mind where feelings come in waves
And irrationality follows you like your shadow,
Always accompanied with the disappointment you brought upon yourself.
I am still trying to wash myself clean of you,
And I am still trying to learn how to.

through_time.php

Kelia Rowan

[Echo tells the computer to “print out” the message, to display it onscreen. Any word with a \$ in front indicates a value, so “echo \$word” would show the value of \$word. For words with multiple values, i.e. “\$word(“A”, “B”), each is assigned a number beginning with 0. So “echo \$word[0]” from the previous example displays A.]

through_time.php

```
<? php  
$need("don't","know","met","like","really","love","miss");  
$time0++  
echo "I"  
if else(0>$time>1){  
    echo $need[2];  
}  
if else(1>$time>3){  
    echo $need[1];  
}  
if else(3>$time>8){  
    echo $need[3];  
}  
if else(8>$time>13){  
    echo $need[4];  
    echo $need[3];  
}  
if else(13>$time>14){  
    echo $need[3];  
    echo $need[3];
```

```
}

if else(14>$time>30){

    echo $need[5];

}

if else(30>$time>98){

    echo $need[4];

    echo $need[5];

}

if else(98>$time>99){

    echo $need[6];

}

if else(99>$time>100){

    echo $need[0];

    echo $need[6];

}

if else {

    echo $need[0];

    echo $need[1];

}

echo "you"

?>
```

i died in an ugly whereby village

Ruben E. Smith

"anyone lived in a pretty how town"

-e e Cummings

I died in an ugly whereby village
(steeples high, people pillaged)
mother goose nursery rhymes,
people crying and people dying.

men and women (big and bad)
showed no happy, no sad
they planted their seed, morose spread
nothing's left but the dead.

my children became (and only some
remember the terrible conundrum
violence, murder, and sins)
that endless sky of hasbeens.

then by today, and when by now,
he did his death, she did her bow
and came the crouching tiger
that bit the life out of her.

everyones divorced their somebodies
cried their laughs and hid their griefs

(restless nights, doesn't dids) we
buried the living they lifted me.

universe greatly did split
(and the rain has such counterfeit;
that in the night the kids dreamed
while mothers sewed their seams).

tomorrow someone was born
(and my wife stopped with scorn)
when in disbelief when in shock
the hurried men turned back the clock

is by is and night by night
and less by less we hide in fright
you and I stuck in the month
souls by souls and lunch by lunch.

men and women(both did and do)
sang their why and cried their who
carried wheat and came their went
for a little pay for a little cent.

Break the Chain

Nicholas Jones

Perfect inversions of paradox in prime,
Reflect their polarities over the fabric of time,
Detection, Impression, Reflection, Denial, Anger, and Shame,
Always this order and always the same,

These events are not random, meaningless, or light,
They act as a link in the chain of life,
Swings and sways – sometimes
Snaps and snares – sometimes,

Detection was a twist of fate,
Through which no light could escape,
Impression was instinctual,
Like a knee jerk following the hammers fall,

Reflection was finding myself in his shoes,
When he was too blind to see it through,
Denial was a shift where the ground gave way,
Then anger followed and so did shame,

But I don't need to describe these,
Because he wears these charms around his neck,
On the chain his heart calls upon,
And the shame it neglects,

He's tired of all of the swings and sways – always,
The snaps and the snares – always,
The burning light which his window glares upon,
Is the flame his anger ignites,

And he uses this flame to burn himself,
So he can feel something – anything,
Something – anything,
Something – anything,

But all he feels is pain,
He speaks in whispers,
He lowers his head in shame,
Lost in his own mind,
I pray he finds peace – someday,
I pray he breaks the chain – someday.

The Wild

Maddie Manuel

Little lost child
Left in the wild
All alone
Nowhere is known
Did you leave it behind?
In the world that made you blind
With the knife by your bed
You know the one that killed you dead
Don't worry child
We are in the Wild
No one judges here
There is nothing to fear
Don't shake your head
All full of dread
We've all lost something
That was once our dream
Some lost their sight
To the beasts of the night
Some lost their mind
As they ran out of time
Some lost their life
To their pain and strife
Some lost their voice
And can't make a noise
We were once a child
When we joined the wild
Now we aren't lost
Together at all costs
A family of freaks
Rejects and tricks
We stand together never apart
This family is an accepting heart

A Brat's Whining at 10:00 PM

Katharyn Hebert

A week's worth of excitement and exhilaration
A stepping stone of wonder and nervousness
I am terrified and in love with you
I am in love with you

A solid gold promise cannot be broken
A smart girl cannot be deceived
My sense will not abandon me
Or so I thought

I wish you were here to hold me
To be conscious with me
Run your fingers through my hair
Run your fingers up my shirt

Please keep your promise
I need you to be here
I love you so much
That I can't breathe without you

I pull away from you in anger
Usually you follow my frame
But this time you don't
Because you're too far away

I wish you were here
But you're so far away
Where are you, you might ask?
Darling, you're right next to me

Understanding

Kailey Wisthoff

Pulses in my ears, I couldn't understand where I was
Blurs in my vision, I couldn't understand what was happening
Tears on my cheeks, I couldn't understand why I wasn't normal
I couldn't understand why I felt this way
Why I had to be broken and everyone else was whole
Why everyone else wasn't broken and I wasn't whole

Two steps forward, twenty steps back
That's what this disease does to me
The air rushes out from my lungs, I feel completely empty inside
My body gasps for air while my mind hopes it stops
I can't control the thoughts, I suppress them but they're never gone

I can't understand why I am alive when others deserve it more
I can't understand why I continue to this life of unfulfillment
No matter how hard I try, I can't stop the breath from disappearing
I can't stop the tears on my cheeks
I can't stop the blurs in my vision
I can't stop the pulses in my ears

Paradise

Nicholas Jones

Paradise is a place I find inside,
A peaceful longing – state of mind,
Where exhaustion is a waste of time,
Where anxieties pass away,
Where change is but a passing phase,

Paradise is a house on a beach,
Where I can write about fame,
Reflect over the ocean,
On who I was when I knew him,
Where eternity meets oblivion,

Paradise is a sacred place,
Where time stands still,
Where my will awakens reaffirmed,
To fight the firm and stay the weak,
From reaching peak persecution,

Paradise is seeing a smile break,
Across a sullen face that buried pain,
Beneath boulders – wrapped in chains,
And knowing that it'll be okay,
One day – eventually,

Paradise is a promise,
That reassures me when night falls,
A hopeful call – on the spirit winds,
Bringing love to life again,
So if you ever need me,

And if you ever need love,
Or a good friend too,
That's where you'll find me,
Waiting in the isles for you,
That's where you'll find me – in paradise.

4AM

Jordan Molitor

4 AM

I am awake.

I am thinking.

4:05 AM

I am awake.

I am longing.

4:06 AM

I am awake.

God, how I miss him.

4:08 AM

I am awake.

I wonder what he's doing.

4:08 AM

I am awake.

He's obviously asleep, you dumbass.

4:10 AM

I am awake.

The universe is strange.

4:12 AM

I am awake.

The absurdity of the universe fuels the human soul.

4:12 AM

I am awake.

Argus

Damn it, I sound like my professor.

4:14 AM

I am awake.

He is also probably sleeping.

4:15 AM

I am awake.

I wonder what they're dreaming about.

4:16 AM

I am awake.

Shit, I have to work on my presentation tomorrow.

4:16 AM

I am awake.

Oh shit, and my final project.

4:16 AM

I am awake.

And find a monologue.

4:17 AM

I am awake.

I need to go to sleep.

4:27 AM

I am awake.

Fucking hell.

4:28 AM

I am awake.

Maybe I should just get up and start working.

4:28 AM

I am awake.

Actually, fuck that.

4:31 AM

I am awake.

Let me sleeaaaaaaaaep.

4:32 AM

I am awake.

I'm kinda hungry.

4:33 AM

I am awake.

I love him so much.

4:38 AM

I am awake.

We're going to have a wonderful life together.

4:40 AM

Am I awake?

Such a wonderful life.

4:42 AM

I'm lying in a large white bed in a minimalistic room with splashes of color from paintings, pictures, and our things around the room. This is a memory, I haven't lived it yet. I know this is my apartment. My head is in his lap, I know his name but it won't come to mind. I'm reading a book to him out loud as he plays with my hair and admires me while leaning against the bed frame. The sun is setting over the horizon and the orange light is streaming through the window as the blinds are up and the curtains drawn back. We live in the city, there are sky scrapers outside but they do not block the horizon as we are on the edge of the city. I look up at him and notice him smiling at me. I poke his nose, it's large and flat and as cute as a button. I can see his face but I can't see his face. He leans down and kisses my lips. His lips are so soft and full, they glide across mine so smoothly. A warm feeling takes over my body. He tells me he loves me, his voice sticky and purple with the words but the back of it is another color. I know the color, but I can't name it. I smile and say it back because I mean it and I know he does too. I am home, he is home.

I am asleep.

Heart

Julian Guerrero

Yes, it is white, though not with years,
nor is it pale from sudden fears,
though fear has grasped its core most dear,
and seen it fall, from year to year.

Yes, it is cold, though not through frost,
for it has payed the greatest cost:
to dream, and crave, for what loves most,
now destitute, now always lost.

Yes, it is gone, though once here dwelled,
in opulence, before it fell,
from ample grace as I now tell,
below the ground, beneath the dales.

Yes, it is hard, as hardest rock,
and it grew so from every rock,
from every lack of lively luck,
forever lone, forever locked.

And it may seem it crumbles last,
for all its sorrows weigh it fast,
and all the sadness of its past
have reached it here, now dead at last.

Yes, it is lost, though not for long,
as it returns here every dawn,
and sings to me its sweetest song:
"Begin again, for life's not long."

Black and Blue

Nicholas Jones

Hold your brother's hands of black,
Change your blue to white and unify,

Love each other into the light,
Before the day comes,
To claim another black star,

Rejoice in the differences,
That make us who we are.

Silent Anxiety

Allie Atkinson

Anxiety is like a child holding onto my leg
Collecting anything worrisome for us to examine later

Spoonful of standards are shoved into my mouth
But I refuse to swallow
I feel myself begin to regurgitate
Any of the unsavory thoughts I've had to stomach

The anxiety that lies dormant rises
Crowded, scanning for familiarity
Hoping for security.
I dismiss myself, blurry-eyed
Their condescending remarks echo
Their venomous laughter is burned in my brain.
Why would they curse me with this stain?
Lingering here like unwelcomed company
Murmurs, the howling of the ocean in a seashell
Amplified anguish, a cacophony that others sing along to
A song that no one taught me the words to
Silence is my solace
It means protection. It means cowardice. It means I sought the higher stand.
It means I try to convince myself that silence is comforting,
But it is the most jarring sound when your mind is loud.
It demands to be felt, tightly wrapping itself around your throat.
But when the howling dims to a whisper,
It is nothing more than a warm-welcomed caress.

Color Me In

Nicholas Jones

3rd Place

Verses interpreted as thematic inertias,
Shape us and free us as we become one with the earth – dust,
Bones rusted like weather-torn iron fences,
Regaining our intellectual senses,
A war waged and won is still loss – the plot thickens,
Color me in complications,

Complicated – the borderline between here and there,
A little bit of everywhere,
And nowhere in particular just the same,
A middle-ground, one way street with no name,
Color me in the traffic lights – correspondence reds and greens,
The stops, the go's, the hits, the throws, and everything in between,

Color me in any way you find tolerable,
Beneath the blue or in the sky,
I'll float the surface to ride the tide,
And wait for you on the other side,
If need be – that's where you'll find me,
On the other side of fantasy,

On the other side of the spectral divide,
I'll think of you from time to time,
Color me in shimmer and shine,
It's complicated – I get it,

In the way you form your sentences,
The air we share is toxic – you and me,

It's a complicated color scheme,
That reaps misfortunes bursting free,
Riding waves to distant seas,
Ones in which you will never find me – again,
But like I said,
I get it,

You're complicated,
It's complicated,
I'm complicated,
All we ever were,
And all we ever will be,
Is complicated.

Forest

Robyn Beatty

The fog hide all the forest creatures,
the damp smell of woods fills the air. beacons of light emerge through the emerald
trees, and dance upon the forest floors.

As the wind mimic hallow sounds of the
native wolfs-

All of a sudden, a sharp sound brakes the tranquil
nature. the forest becomes silent as the sound echo's.
such a disturbance this sound has begotten.

I Loved You

Maddie Manuel

How do you think I feel?

"I'm Fine"

"I'm ok"

That's what I say so I don't make you feel bad.

Though you should

You should feel bad

you deserve the pain

you caused me so much of mine

you never cared about me so don't fake it now.

"I'm sorry"

"I'm truly sorry"

your voice says to me

the sweet honey drips

"No you aren't

so don't act

you aren't very good at it"

My mind wants me to hate you

It wants me to stop loving you

I can't

I loved you

and still do

Yes We Can (I Hope We Can)

Nicholas Jones

The definition of hate is a powerful fate,
One that is worse than death,
It lingers on the borderline between infamy,
And the fear of things we can't understand,
So where does that leave us - here and now,
Where destiny and fortune smiles on something,
As wicked as the right side of the west wing,
Hate is a bird that sings as beautifully,
As a bomb detonation in a war-torn nation,

We were led with general applause and cheers,
The best we'd been led to believe for the past eight years,
Now to be meet with jeers from allies alike,
Regression feeds the passion of hatred,
Which only serves itself in the passing of time,

When one man says yes we can,
It's almost impossible to stop trying,
Once he leaves his helm on Capitol Hill,
An ocean becomes an oil spill,
And yes we can - a rallying cry-plea,
Becomes I hope we can - do better,
Not just for me - but for you too,
Where red meets white meets blue,
Where 44 meets 45 - we wait for Independence Day,
To thrive - once again,
If we make it there,
Can we make it there?

Yes - we can,
I hope we can.

Twinkle

Robyn D. Beatty

Shimmering through the night,
the light sparked hope in my eyes.
That daunting light so bright.

'Tis but a flicker that ignites inside,
Like a Phoenix I rise above, the pile of embers.

When I reach the highest peak, the golden sphere calls me,
bring me near, I no longer tremble with fear.
The quest must continue,
The quest must continue,
Till my internal flame burns out for good.

A Daydream

Allie Atkinson

My thoughts would waltz to you
When the stars were gleaming,
Seeming to glide through my fantasies
So the world wouldn't seem so harsh.

The clouds have cleared.
I have nowhere to rest my head,
So I lay in bed and imagine us
Always choosing each other instead.
But one peek of a passing comet
And your eyes glistened, reflective in the moonlight.
As you gravitated to its enchanting flames,
Painting the cloaked night.

And when you looked at me
I realized you were blinded,
And I was but a wisp of a day dream
That you awoke from.

Father Figure

Nicholas Jones

Father Figure of yesterday,
We need your guidance – your positivity,
Free enterprise and self-esteem,
We need sanction from the despair that follows prosperity,
Where can we find solace in the loss of liberty?
In flags hung upside down - a broken plea,
Was this land made for you and me?

I just can't be sure anymore,
When shores converge from sea to sea,
Was freedom fought for you and me?
I wonder now – what is true,
Between the reds and whites and blues?

Lady Liberty - mother and immigrant from abroad,
Her brother Sam - our uncle dear was born here,
The grandfather Cherokee - the native of the land,
And the ones brought captive - bless the motherland and your ancestry,
And your prosperity through the raging storm,
In which you have been born for generations in waves,
Periods of oppression and progression just the same,
May we truly find justice for all - one day,
I pray that we still can,

To our father figure now,

When a man takes rights away from his people - what does he stand for?

Is it his convictions?

Do they compel him - do they have demands?

Does he fold his hands to find the answer?

Truly - is this the future you seek for your daughters?

Your mother - from whence you were born,

Your sisters and your friends,

To where does your disloyalty extend?

I wonder - I do,

New Father Figure,

Does your conviction define you,

Or do your prejudices confine you?

Poetic Ambition

Daraseres Hicks

Falling

The more I scream the less people are gonna hear

Falling

Listening to the deafening voices that are in my head

Falling

Boom!

I've hit the bottom of what I thought was my bottomless pit

Drowning in a pool of my deepest thoughts

Wanting to know how did I get here

Wanting to know exactly what I'm trying to say

Look at my reflection in a pool of tears and see a different person

A person filled with poetic ambition

I lay on the other side wishing I could be him

Who are you? I ask

"Everything you wish you were" he says

The longer I lay

The harder and harder it gets to breathe

I feel myself being suffocated by the darkness from within

What can I do?

What can I say?

I just feel like I'm just here..... going day by painful day

Eternal suffering killing my mental slowly

Wishing I could be better

Wishing I could be the person I see in that reflection

Seeing something I'm not gives me that motivation to become it

The Short Story I Can't Write

Maggie Harris

A world of first impressions,

I think,

Would be best for everyone. Why,

You ask?

This is a question,

I say,

Best answered in a story.

I write

Right words beyond me.

This is a pondering parable that I can't get out.

What if

You knew

The words

I say

Every night

To myself?

At first

You won't

Care but

I know

That's best.

I see

That truths

You will

Know are

Yours to
Discover if
You have
The time.

This is a paranoid principle that pervades my life.

Superstitious, that's what
I am.
The most superstitious person
You will
Ever meet in the world.

Stories spoken can't be written.
Simple statements can't be recanted.
Knock on wood three times.
My paranoia knows no bounds.
Hello! This is the image
want
To remain, to maintain, so
You won't
Know, notice how my hands shake
I won't
Let loose my inhibitions the first time
You want
To know, notice this person.

This is where, perfectly poised, I wish to remain.
Write about what scares you
He said.
But what do you write about
I ask
When you're afraid of everything?

My Source

André Boyer

I hear.

I listen.

I speak.

I sing.

I dance.

When we connect I'm instantly in a trance

Like A rope has gripped my soul

No other thing has ever made me more enhanced

It nourishes me like no other food

It supports me like no ground could ever do

It excites me like a kid at the zoo

When I can not speak it becomes my voice

When I can not find the words to explain the confusion that is life

It becomes my source

I can not go long without it because its been with me from the start

It's like a foreign language that only I can understand

My soul is in tune to the vibrations

It is a part of me, every strand

And has enchanted generations

That which Is beloved

Music.

Is my hub

It encompasses my fears, strength, anger, happiness, love, and sadness.

It allows me to be human.

Rag Doll

Allie Atkinson

Oh my sweet porcelain doll

How pretty you sit from afar

Oh my sweet porcelain doll

How hollow inside you are

My oh my how your head has grown

What happened to you while I was on my own?

My dearest doll, you've been on your stand for too long

Don't you see you'll gather dust?

My dearest doll, you rest under your raincloud

Don't you realize you'll rust?

Time hasn't treated you kindly, my dearest

You're a sight for sore eyes, this is clearest

My doll, how did you get that crack?

How oh how could it happen like that?

My dingy rag doll, your crown suits you

For it is dull and worn too

I Can't Write Now

Katie Rayburn

Not now, tomorrow

Not tomorrow, maybe next week

What time do I have to put pen to paper

Or fingertips to keys?

"I can't right now"

how many times do we say that-

hear that—

really mean that?

I can't right now—

I can't write now—

Because I couldn't write right then

And now all the poetry

From my poorly plighted mind is gone.

I can't write now

Because who would listen?

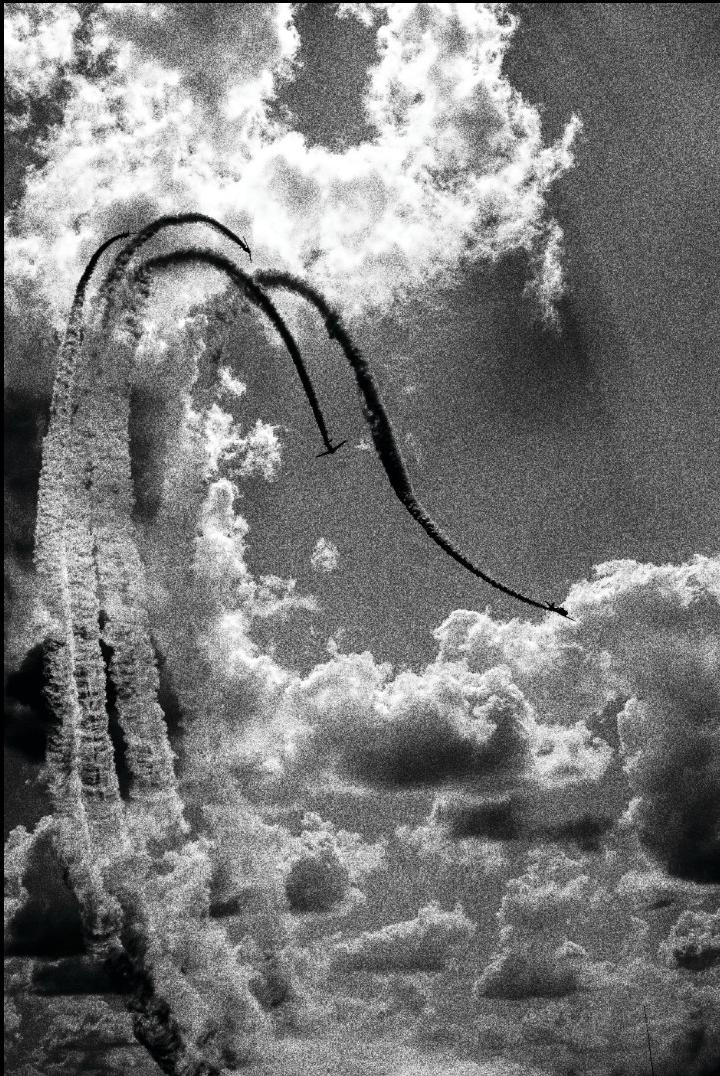
"I can't right now" turns into

"I wish I had" when we lose the chance.



*Fine Art
&
Photography*

Photography 1st Place



Air Show

Sean McGraw

Fine Art 1st Place



Winding Road

Laura Scronce

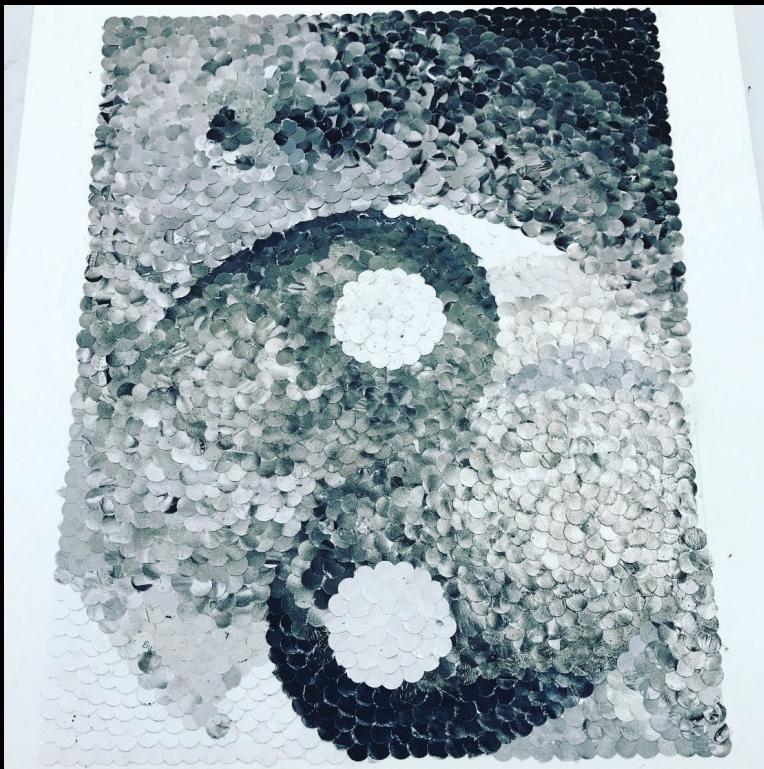
Photography 2nd Place



The Beach is Calling

Kailey Wisthoff

Fine Art 2nd Place



Yin and Yang

Ariel Bailey

Photography 3rd Place



darks and lights

Emilee Landry



The Mighty Kraken

Maddie Manuel

Photography Staff Pick



The Sea Speaks

Alexis Trosclair



Sea Dragon

Ariel Bailey



Fiction

First Place

The Heart Tailor

Casey Alfultis

Roxy

I've heard stories so often about a man they call the heart tailor. They say that he can fix any heart, no matter how damaged. No one has actually seen his heart, but they say it's so large and so vibrant that you can feel it just by being in his presence. Some say he has eyes as blue as the ocean while some say they're the deepest green you'll ever see, but they all say you can feel the compassion in them. Everyone has heard about him in one way or another, and many have tried to find him, including myself. Everyone listened to stories and searched everywhere they could, but so few people found him. I need him. My heart is damaged, I can't figure out what's wrong, and neither can my family or my love. I want to feel whole again, and I need what they say he can give. And just when I was losing hope in finding him, everything changed.

My friend Tabby came to me with her heart in her hands and the purest smile I had seen on her face in a long time. "He's real," she gushed. My chest fluttered, butterflies filled my stomach. I looked down at her heart, it was gentle and red and carefully patched together with golden thread in so many places.

"What happened?" I tried my best not to sound anxious, but I know it was everywhere in my voice.

"I was walking home, and I looked over at a group of guys playing basketball, and there was a man that just radiated warmth. I just knew it had to be him. So I waited. And when they finished, I ran up to him and struck up conversation, we talked

for a while, and he was so kind. He heard every word and seemed to care so much. And then I showed him my heart. He took it gently in his hands and asked me to meet him there again tomorrow. I was a little nervous about letting someone take my heart, but I felt like it was what I needed to do. So I met him back at the court, and as he handed back my heart, I felt this warmth wash over me. He told me he'd done what he could and he was sorry he couldn't do more. He had fixed patches I hadn't even seen! And I can't tell you how great it feels, Rox."

I looked at her and every fiber of my being pleaded before I could even gasp the words out. "Can you take me to him?"

"Of course!" She chirped before grabbing me by the hand and dragging me away.

We approached the court, and I knew as soon as we got close exactly which one he was. He was taller and skinnier than I expected. But you could see the glow around him. I could feel my heart pounding against me, as they took the last shot I heard the most joyous laugh, and he walked up to one of the guys, who has a glow almost as bright as his own, but it wasn't quite the same. He hugged him and patted him on the head and walked to change his shoes. As he sat down, Tabby grabbed me by the hand and drug me to him. As we approached, he looked up and locked eyes with me, then looked over to Tabby. "Hello! How are you feeling?" he asked in a calm and low voice.

"I feel amazing!" She gleamed "thank you so much again. But um.... could you help my friend sir? She really needs you." For a split second I saw a flicker in his eyes, but I'm not sure what exactly it was. But it was gone just as quickly as it came, and he looked to me. His eyes were blue, made a little brighter by the blue shirt he had on. His hair a shaggy blond mess. His smile gentle and sweet.

"Of course," he said slowly and gently. "May I speak with her for a while?" He asked Tabby, and she nodded and smiled but didn't move. After a long pause, she squeaked.

"Speak to her alone... of course, I'm sorry" she hurried before scurrying off. He then looked at me and smiled; he radiated so bright that I felt a little warmer just being close to him. We talked for a while, it seemed he was just getting to know me, learning what I liked and how I acted, and then after a long while talking as the sun began to set he asked me if I would give him my heart for the night and meet him back here. I froze for a second, I felt nervous, but as I looked into his eyes I knew it would be okay. I carefully pulled my heart out and handed it to him.

"Please be careful with that..." I stumbled as he took it gently in his hands.

"Well, of course" he smiled. "That's the only way they should be handled. I'll meet you back here tomorrow." And with that he left. As I walked home I began to feel sluggish without my heart. So I smiled to my fiancée when I got home, told him I loved him but I needed to sleep. And went to bed. I woke late in the afternoon. Still feeling worn down but ready to head to the basketball court I'd seen him at. When I got there, he was sitting on the bench while the rest of the guys played. I walked over next to him and slumped down gently onto the bench. "Hello again," he said cheerily,

but there was something a little different this time. I couldn't put my finger on it. He looked at me and gently reached into a bag and carefully pulled my heart out. I saw golden wire threaded through places I didn't know were damaged, I took it gently in my hands and carefully put it up. And the entire world brightened. In an instant everything changed. I felt an all new kind of joy spread from my toes to my head, and I felt invigorated. I felt brand new. I threw my arms around him, and he strongly returned the hug. As we separated, he looked at me. His eyes were just as kind and gentle, but they drooped a little. He seemed to almost have bags under his eyes, but I was pulled out of my thoughts as he spoke again.

"I did everything I could. I'm sorry I couldn't do more. I hope you enjoy," he said in the most genuine and compassionate voice I could imagine, and I felt energy burst through my body. I looked towards the court, and the man he had hugged was looking at us. His glow was just as bright as before, but it didn't feel as warm today. We locked eyes for just a second, he scoffed, shook his head, and went back to playing. Before I could even say anything the heart tailor spoke up. "Don't mind him, he's just the jealous type. You should go be with your family and your lover, they will be happy to have you back to yourself." He encouraged. So I got up, thanked him one last time and left. And my life has flourished since. I feel so much better, I love deeper and smile brighter. And I'm here to tell you that the heart tailor is real. So hold on to that hope.

Christopher

I grabbed a Powerade and plopped onto the couch to rest. I'd gone to work out after basketball, and he stayed behind to talk to some girl again. He never learns. My fiancée Robin plopped next to me. We sat together and watched tv for a long while when I heard the door open

and close and hurried footsteps run into the garage. I smiled at Robin, and she already knew what was going on. She nodded at me, and I walked down into the garage. "Hey best friend," I called to him.

"Hey, honey!" He cheered back, but he was already fast at work. I sat down across from his make shift work bench and watched as he set the girl's heart gently down. Her red heart looked perfectly fine to me. Yet he was gonna fix it like always. He gracefully produced his own heart and set it down on the work bench. The unique gold of his heart glowed as bright as it always does. It's pretty incredible honestly. I've seen plenty of hearts, and all of them are just the same old red. For some reason, his was different. He began peeling away, pulling thin pieces off of his heart. I grabbed his hand to stop him, and he looked up at me.

"Don't give me that look," he pleaded.

"You don't have to do this. You need to stop doing this. It's not worth it, bro! Just take it back and tell her you don't see

anything wrong with it. It looks perfectly fine to me."

"But it's not Chris, and I can fix it. I will fix it," he said coldly and simply. He had that look in his eyes, and I knew he was set on it. I let go of his hands and let him work. I felt my heart drop as I saw him peel more and more off his own heart. He carefully and gently sewed together pieces of the heart that didn't even seem broken to me. But it always worked. You could always see the glow in people's eyes when they got their heart back. I looked at his heart again. It was smaller than when we first met. And shreds of it were just peeled off. But no matter how small and tattered his heart seemed to get, he didn't change. He fought through. He helped everyone he could. The problem is, the more the stories spread, the more people look for him, and the more people that find him, the easier it gets for others to find him. No one sees him like a person any more, they see him as a hero who can repair their heart. And heroes don't need any help. So no one is looking to help him put his heart back together anymore.

2nd Place

The Garden of Portraits

Maggie Harris

Stan, the headstone man, did not expect to use his degree in technology this way. He had thought that he would spend his days in a boxy, beige office in some great corporate tower, happy to play the fool for King Paycheck. However, the company he happened to sign away his meager soul to, had been the first to design the Portrait Headstone technology. Gone were the days of impersonal crimson cloth flowers. The back of Stan's denim work shirt read, "Your Loved Ones Preserved as You Remember Them!" Stan wasn't much for marketing, but he thought the slogan was off-puttingly creepy. Some great mind looking down from the lofty heights of an executive suite had decided this would be emblazoned across Stan's uniform without his input, much as they had decided to put him on the graveyard shift.

The whole thing was creepy, really, Stan thought, as he finished putting together the last pieces over the last grave in the fading daylight. He was rushing to finish. He didn't want to be there after dark. They came out at dark.

Stan paused momentarily, looking down at the little black box and camera in the ground. The box read, "GRAY, DON" in straight, unamused print. Stan was suddenly reminded of his father.

Stan's father had been a gardener for dozens of years. He compared everything to flowers. "You keep reading those books, Stanley, and one day you will flower like a floribunda after a wet spring." Floribunda, Stanley remembered flipping through his pocket dictionary, "flowering

in abundance." Stan had not inherited his father's green thumb, though he sometimes wished he had.

Twilight was approaching. Stanley closed the lid to the box and surveyed the graveyard. It looked like a field enclosed by a wrought-iron fence, nothing more. The graveyard would open soon, and the portraits would turn on at dusk. Stan thought about how his father might explain this strange place.

"See-through pictures sprout out of the ground at night time, like moon flowers. It's a damned miracle, Stanley, a damned miracle."

At the gate, Stan saw the people had already began to gather. Gray grievers and pale mourners alike milled about in front of the gate, looking rather like restless ghosts. A wraith-like, sallow-cheeked girl grasped a rope around a mangy brown dog's neck, gave him a withering look as he slipped past them. Getting past the visitors was Stan's least favorite part of his job. Stan's job was his least favorite part of his life, and he didn't much care for the life he had. Stan considered how much his father had enjoyed his occupation. His father had been a happy man, as full of life as his teeming flowerbeds.

On his way home, thoughts of his father, pocket dictionaries, and moon flowers rolling around noisily in his mind, like spilled marbles, Stan decided he would stop by the library in the morning, to look for

a book on gardening.

There was no place in the city for a dog to piss. The dog yanked at his rope with a high-pitched whimper, but each time The Girl looked down at him he quieted. The Girl was tired, and she was hungry. The Dog had come up to The Girl over a week ago, flea-ridden and hungry. The Neighbor said he would pay her enough for a loaf of bread in exchange for it. She had refused. Now she wished she hadn't.

The Cop had chased them out of the park. The Mother had shooed them away from The Church steps. This was the last place The Girl could think of. The artificial torch light suddenly beamed down on the crowd. There was a Blue Man who came forward and opened the gate for them. He glanced at her, and she glared back, daring him to ask her to leave. He didn't.

She and her dog followed the other people-shaped shadows into the graveyard. The portraits flickered to life, one by one. The images cast a thin blue light around the ground beneath them. The faces of the dead quivered and shifted. They smiled down at The Girl and The Dog. She did not care for their deadness.

They reminded her of Him. She had been chasing newspaper tumbleweeds along the sidewalk. She had not noticed Him until she had tripped over Him. Scrambling and frightened, she had tried to help Him up. His eyes were big, unseeing. His mouth opened at a strange angle. His coldness crawled up her skin and clutched at her. She wasn't sure who had screamed first, the Woman who walked up behind her or herself. She had ran then, ran in any direction to get as far away from Death as possible.

"Piss already," she mumbled. The Dog sniffed around the different portraits. He stopped below the image of a white-haired man, with a serious face. He was neither smiling nor frowning, the folds around his eyes gave him a pondering look. His kind of deadness didn't bother her as much.

She looked down at the metal plate. The markings on it meant nothing to her. She could not read. She wondered who he was, and if he had any children. He looked like the Newspaper Stand Man, who had once given her the rest of his hot coffee.

The Dog had pissed on the dead man's name plate, but The Girl did not move until she saw a woman walking her way. The Woman was looking at her. Yanking on The Dog's rope, The Girl walked toward the exit. She would not, the girl decided as she crossed the gate, give The Dog to The Neighbor. At least, not tonight.

Death had always seemed distant and vague to Mary. Even those that death had taken from her seemed somehow to remain untouched in her memory. Wandering in this graveyard of portraits, looking for a familiar face, she felt death's presence in the crisp night air, heard it in the buzz of the holograms.

She had seen the glow from the graveyard when she stepped out of her vehicle and into the poorly lit parking lot. Rows of arcs of light that at a distance looked like portals into another world shone from behind the stately fence. Mary was reminded of the will o' the wisps of the Irish that her grandfather had told her stories of as a child. He had loved to tell her supernatural stories. Her grandfather taught her how to

play checkers, how to eat peanut butter like a champ, and how to pass a test without having read the textbook. He was not a severe man, but a practical one. His favorite past-time was reciting poems from memory. He favored Shelley's work, particularly "Ozymandias."

He was generous, though not to a fault. He had supplemented her funds, and supported her entirely in her pursuit of an education her parents could not provide her with. The last time she talked to him was when he had dropped her off at the dorm for her third year. Mid-October two pink lines had sliced through her life, severing her from both college and her grandfather.

Maybe that's why she felt her stomach flop violently when she saw her grandfather gazing at her across the way. She walked to him slowly, and as she did she noticed a small, grimy child and her equally dirty dog sitting next to him. When the girl saw Mary she bolted. Mary barely wondered who she was.

Mary came and knelt at her grandfather's grave. The ground smelt like piss and wet earth. The little box that the image projected out of was shiny and new. Mary wondered what happened when the installer had first seen him. Did the graveyard man like being among these strangely solemn ghosts, or did he have to work up the courage to come to work every day?

Mary lay an uncertain finger in the groove of the writing on the box. The nameplate read, "Don Gray--Beloved Husband, Father, & Grandfather."

Marian Gray cleared her throat loudly. "Hey, gramps. I know you're probably not too happy to see me." On the contrary, he looked completely indifferent. Mary shivered. "But I just wanted to let you know, I saw an article on Facebook--they found the statue of Ozymandias a few days ago." Mary took a deep breath and stood.

Her grandfather's portrait was just of his head and shoulders. The rest of him dissolved into the blue light. She reached out to touch his wispy hair, but her hand passed through the image.

Pictures captured moments, Mary thought, but portraits captured people. There she stood, in a cage full of the captured dead. Was it beautiful or sad?

Mary couldn't think of anything else to say. Don Gray's blank stare followed his granddaughter out of the graveyard, and into her dreams. Mary would think of the graveyard of portraits sometimes, when she looked at her baby, and wonder if technology made the world better for them, or worse.

Procrastination and Imagination

Skylar Guidroz

A college student sat, hunched over her computer. A million story ideas raced through her head--each tantalizing to think about in theory, most lacking the content to justify a fully developed piece. She tapped her fingers against the glowing red keys, demanding they make the words do something.

nngkoengolnt kslg ns,gs, jkrg
kdrhd,bndjhjrk mb---not that. Anything but
that

She considered writing a short piece of fanfiction, already knowing that whatever she started to write would not be short. It would be excruciatingly long for whatever simple, fluffy concept she wanted to address. And she would probably kill someone off because she was the author and could do anything she wanted in her own damn stories and no one could stop her. Next to her, Death stroked his scythe the way one would stroke a cat, raising an eyebrow as he read over her last statement. She glared at him, tapping one key with her pointer finger over and over.

If she were to write a story now, or hell maybe even start one of her novels that she had so painstakingly planned, it would have to be bold, intriguing. A million dollar idea that would let her drop out of college and live in the middle of the French Alps like the hermit she truly wanted to be. Wait, no. She couldn't do that. That would require her to have something that good stored away in her pink slush of a brain. She reached up and unhinged her skull, flipping it back. She stirred up the pink mush with a delicate,

inherited spoon. Bringing the spoon down to her lips so she could inspect it, a glob landed in her lap. She stuck the spoon in her mouth and scooped up the fallen brain matter with her fingers before sucking that up as well.

"How does brain tissue taste?" you might ask.

"Terrible," is what she would say. "It tastes terrible, but I'm out of Nutella and I already took my pants off so I ain't going to the store to get more."

As a last resort, she browsed the web for writing prompts or writing challenges. Most were weird and fairly stupid in her opinion, either aimed at being written for a fandom or someone's precious OTP or something so abstract she felt more puzzled rather than inspired. What was she supposed to do with a prompt that only had '33%' written? Was that some sort of sci-fi reference she was too cool to know about? Or was someone just really baked when they came up with such a stupid prompt? And what sort of idiot would actually write something based on a mathematical/numerical/ whatever the frick term could be used to describe '33%'?

(You see where this is going, right?)

In an underground bunker beneath the student's feet, a large group of people in deep purple robes with hoods shadowing their faces stood in a circle. They all chanted in Latin--because that is the language you speak in these sorts of affairs--their leader moving to stand in the center of the

exalted stage. They pushed back their hood to reveal a familiar face, "Professors

of our esteemed University. I have called you here to announce that our plot of world domination has recently gained traction. The translation of the ancient book of spells has finally been decoded thanks to the remarkable work of our language department."

department.

A round of applause rose from the audience. The language teachers all bowed and raised their hands at the praise. One hooded figure leaned over to the next to hiss, "Yay for them, but are they going to mention how many freakin' died to get them that text? Or when we're actually going to get paid?"

“Shhh!”

"Don't you shush me, I have a PhD
in--"

The leader continued, eyes gleaming in the dim lighting, "Now, due to our many shared years of struggle, our lord the Ancient Purple Horned Demon shall finally be raised from the depths of Scholastica in order to exterminate those who oppose our enlightened teachings! After all these years, we have finally achieved 33% of what we need in order to make this dream a reality!"

Back in the cheering crowd, the previously pessimistic person once again leaned over to their neighbor to whisper, "But, isn't that a failing grade? Why are we celebrating failure?"

"Would you be quiet before the President of the University has us killed for insubordination?"

In the dorm room, Death scratched his head and yawned before standing up. He had work to do—he didn't have time to hover over a procrastinating, writers-blocked student who was the most self-distracted individual he had ever met. She had Netflix on while listening to music on her phone while browsing the web while

also watching a YouTube video on how to make teriyaki chicken (Why would she need to know that? She's a vegetarian!).

And yet she wondered why she could never get anything done.

The student ignored his abrupt departure. He would be back. He always came back.

Crash

The college student shrieked loud enough to wake the Ancient Purple Horned Demon in the depths of Scholastica and then slam dunked her laptop into a blackhole--thus destroying any hope she had for passing the semester.

Or actually writing anything.

Honorable Mention

Old New Mexico Blues

Ruben E. Smith

I am a poet in the desert. I live and breathe in the red dust, relish in the landscape that morphs around me. I feel like I belong out here, but I hate it here, the way it's always hot in the day, yet cold in the night. It makes my skin feel dry, like I need to go and cut open a cactus and rub the inside membrane on my wrinkled skin. It's not like I've never done that before.

The desert took many things from me, but it has also given me many things, such as the pinto bean bush. It grows without much water, produces a bean the size of the tip of your finger, and feeds the hate I have for it. It had nothing to do with my father's force-feeding me the bean, for he never did such a thing to me or my brother. He would always come home with a taffy that he had bought for a penny at the market, tell us we could have it after our dinner. Mother always cooked fine meals, mostly fried chicken, stewed potatoes with cream, and a glass of iced water that never seemed to taste bland. I miss those meals, that water, and the taffy. I feel hunger for a taffy right about now.

As I draw water from the dusty well near the Yucca Yucca, I thirst for a glass of that ice water. I take my bucket of muddy water and pour it into a large pot on top of my wood stove, the only source of heat I have in the cold nights. I dare not start a fire now, midday, because the thermometer with a painted Virgin Mary on the front of it read 102 degrees. I take out a picture of boiled, treated water and drink. It wets my parched, cracked lips, but I still miss the iced water, the way the sweat on the glass would drip down.

After I drink the water, I walk to the living room, where a couch the color of the sky sits, several places worn from avid sitting,

and a chair with a beautiful floral pattern of wisteria and lilac blooms. I had never seen a pattern of flowers like the one on the chair, so I bought it at a flea market from a Mexican woman who said it was her mother's design. She sold it to me cheap. I go to this chair and sit down. Next to me is a table with a lamp attached to it. When I didn't have electricity, the lamp was useless, but I use solar panels to get my electricity these days. I turn on the lamp, mainly because it's hard to see these days because the desert has given me bloodshot eyes with stigmatism. I can hardly read, much less write my poetry.

I write a few verses, then I go to my bed and pull back the covers. I think to myself it's time I lied down for the day; I'm tired, need rest. I take my pants off and throw them on the chair next to my desk. I get into the bed and pull the covers over me. I sleep, for a long, long time, hardly waking in between.

I wake up the next morning with a severe headache. If I had a eucalyptus tree, I'd chew a leaf from it, but I have no eucalyptus tree. The only plants I have are the damned pinto bean bushes that grow in the garden, their leaves a yellowish green, dying yet still living in this desolate place. The story of how I got the pinto beans is a story I tell my knick-knack shelf every now and then.

It was probably mid-February and the temperature had reached below fifty. It was cooler than I'm used to, and I love the winters here. It's probably the only thing I love about this place. I decided I needed to be independent and self-sufficient, so I drove to town in my 1971 Jeep Commando. It's the ugliest color they made that year. I went to town and decided to buy some

seeds to start a garden. I took what little money I had, in hopes of starting a large garden. I made it to the feed store about a quarter to six that evening. I lived two hours from civilization, so it's always a long trek to town and back.

I got there, and the man said he was waiting on a shipment of seeds to come in. The only seeds he had were non-edible kinds of flowers, like petunias and daisies. Screw the daisies. I was devastated they didn't have my seeds. As I walked out of the store, this man stopped me. He was wearing a big shirt that looked like a dress and was vibrant with colors. Oranges and yellows mixed on his shirt, with black spots here and there. The shirt reminded me of Africa, not New Mexico. He had a straw hat on that was worn around the brim, loose straw hanging down. His hair was as gray as my spit when I was sick.

"Pardon me, ma'am," he said, tipping his hat, his smile exposing a few missing teeth.

"Yes? Can I help you?"

"Oh, ma'am, I think I can help you. See, the comedy is I have just what you're looking for. You're looking for the seeds to feed, right?" He raised up his shirt, making me think I was about to see some weird Indian shit. He picked up the colorful shirt and exposed a belt around his toned stomach. It was burlap. And hanging on the belt was little burlap sacks, each labeled with a Sharpie marker. One read Butt'r Beans, my favorite. I asked him if those were seeds, and he just shook his head up and down in response.

"How much?" I asked, cutting to the chase.

"For you, three cents a seed. Fair?"

Supply and demand, I told myself, and agreed. My total was nearly eight dollars at the end of the whole mess. I was happy with my seeds, but when I got home and planted them, I realized something

wasn't right. The butter beans weren't butter beans, and I should have known that. As I dug a hole in the row with my finger and plopped the first "butter bean" in the hole, I realized it was a speckled pinto bean, my least favorite. The man with the colorful shirt lied to me. These

weren't butter beans.

Now, as I walk to my Jeep, I look over at the garden, waiting to be picked. All that was there was the pinto bean bushels and the one, sole yellow squash plant that seems to stay alive. The corn dried up along with the tomato plants and the other plants I hoped would bloom and give me food. But they died with the heat of the desert. Today's the day I must run to town to pick up my monthly supplies. Here it is, the start of July, and I'm already out of shampoo for the shower I take every other day and out of sugar for the sweet tea I enjoy when I can. It's mostly hot sweet tea, which I've gotten used to, I guess. I climb into my Jeep and crank it with the key that has a skeleton fob attached to it. As I put the car into drive, I look up at the lone tree that stands on top of the hill of sand next to my plot. A gravestone sits under the netleaf hackberry. It blooms in early April, and that's when that gravestone was put there last year.

I take off down the dirt road and see a jackrabbit run across. I am surprised at first, but then I tell myself he'll be dinner one of these nights. That's what my protein consists of in the desert: jackrabbits, rattle snakes, and the occasional grouse. I kill them with my sling shot and ball-bearings. I need to pick up another pack at the hardware store, I remind myself.

After thinking about all this stuff, my mind travels back to my headache. It's not pounding as bad as it was, but it's still there. I think about the contents of my glove box, and what was useful for a headache. There's a box of Kleenex that have grains of sand in them, the owner's manual for the Jeep, and a pack of gum that's probably melted to hell by now. I can't remember if that's all that's in there or not, so I pop open

the glove box. There's the Kleenex, the owner's manual, but the gum is gone. There was nothing in there for my headache.

I keep driving, hoping my pain would ease.

I get back from town at a quarter to five with my slim pickings. I unload the Jeep and sing a Marty Robbins' song I had heard on the radio. After unloading and finishing the song, I take a bucket of collected rain water—another rare occurrence around here—and water the pinto beans and the lone squash plant. There's beans to pick, but I'm not going to pick any today. I tell myself I'll do it tomorrow, give myself something to do.

After finishing in the garden, I move to the kitchen, where I can cook the steak I bought from town. This is the only time I could eat steak, so I take out a 9-inch fry pan and put it on top of the wood stove. I have to throw wood in and start a fire before my steak spoiled. The only refrigeration I have out here is a small refrigerator that runs when it wants to. Today, it didn't feel like running. I tell myself I'll get it fixed, but I never do because I don't have time or money. Things have to be done, but they don't. There's nothing to do out this way besides stare at the desert when the days get longer.

I throw the wood into the stove and tear off a piece of cardboard box I

had been using. I take the match box and light one up. Throwing it on the cardboard, the flames begin to spread along the brown paper, igniting the wood above it. I shut the hatch and open the blower, a small door below the hatch that feeds the stove oxygen. I take off one of the stove tops that holds in the heat and watch as a little flame shoots up, out of the hole. I need a skillet for my steak. I run into the kitchen and grab one. I rush back to the stove and throw the skillet on the growing flame.

Now, the oil and the steak. I walk into the kitchen and find the oil behind the towel I use to wash the counter. I remember I set the steak on the table and shuffle over to it. There, wrapped in plastic, was my high-dollar steak that cost me three dollars. I set down the oil and unwrap the marble meat. I marvel at the red meat, seeing the white swirl around in the bloody flesh. There, in the white fat was little strings of disgusting worms.

I curse out loud and throw the meat back on the plastic. It looked like my steak was worm-infested, like Herod's brain before he died. Now I've started up the stove, but I don't have anything good to throw on it. I curse again as I go to my record player and pick up a Roy Orbison album I've had for nearly twenty years. I pick up the needle and place the record on the turntable. Placing the needle on it, I wait for "Only the Lonely" to begin playing. I need a man in glasses to take me away from my wormy meat.

Glass Zoo

Nicolas Fry

"Your funeral was today, F-10," a young man sat opposite me with six-inches of safety glass between us. He looked up from the grey box in front of him with an eyebrow raised.

"Must have been weird. Miss H-4," I lifted a white pin from its little cavity and waited to hear my friend tell me I was wrong and far from my mark.

"Oh it was, with the closed casket, everyone crying, and it was grim and dark, grimdark. Heard that a quarter of your skull was just a mess. What was that joke you used to make? Miss, E-10," his suit a slate grey, with a skinny black tie and his head shaved on both sides with a mess of tight curls on top of his head falling to the right. I pulled my gaze back to my grid, staring at the little plastic boats. "Hit," there was a pause, "I used to say that I'd paint my brains all over the ceiling and call it a Jackson Pollock piece. Just some funny shit to say to shock a crowd, ya' know?" I let out a brief snort, "But hey, a hollow-point round is gonna' make a mess no matter what way you go," I closed the lid of my half of battleship and walked towards the back of the enclosure to open a desk drawer and place it inside. It slid shut with a click. I traced a finger along the handgun that rested on top of the desk. Cold to the touch black steel that reeked with that just-cleaned, iron tang.

"Yeah, a really great joke," my friend opened a messenger bag and put away his half and rose to his feet, dusting the back of his dress pants.

"Look, man, I just—" he rapped a knuckle against the glass before I could continue.

"Visiting hours are over soon. I don't want to be here when the crowds come in to watch it happen. Hope it doesn't

hurt, I'll be back again in about a week," he thumbed the intercom switch and shoved his hands into his pockets. Walking away, as he dug out a cigarette and a lighter like he always did. Which left me alone again, in the same little room. One crafted so well that it resembled my room right down to the same stains on the carpet.

Of course, there was the giant glass wall that overlooked part of a grey hallway with the lights dimmed to a soft glow. I dropped onto my bed and kicked off my shoes, hands thrust up under the pillow to support it as it cradled my head. It felt late, always did. Like a perpetual weight rested on my chest to anchor me to the mattress. A fist-sized red clock read eleven p.m. In forty-nine minutes I would be dead. Just like that night. It seemed unending, this nightmare I was in. Remembering the feeling of smoking but never really craving to light up a smoke. Banging my head against the glass as I waited for the inevitable countdown. Today had been the first time I had a visit from someone I knew, someone I loved. That dug a pit in my stomach. I closed my eyes, wishing I could sleep through it all.

"A twenty-one year old male that took his own life via firearm, we here at Death's Doors would like to proudly announce we were successfully able to reconstruct a suicide for your viewing and understanding," waking up to the dozens of onlookers with their phones held out while a woman in a white uniform gave a rather enthusiastic speech on the museums newest display is not the worst part of my day. The clock hit the forty minute mark and I rose from my bed, a hush fell over the crowd as eager faces stared in awe. I opened the drawer and reached past the game to a ring box, the black velvet kind.

Inside was a small baggie, a razor and a piece of a plastic straw. Setup was

the same, three lines stop the shaking, clear the mind, and I could hear the voices raging. I slumped into the chair, pawing at the grip of the gun before me. No tears, no noise, just the tumult of failures and screeching cacophony as I pressed the barrel against the soft flesh just in front of my right ear. Just sitting there, thinking about everything in my life that went wrong and what lead me to this point. I didn't care what anyone else would say, how anyone else would feel. I wanted the tightness on my chest to go away. I wanted to stop thinking, to stop breathing, to stop seeing, to stop existing, to do anything else and not be stuck in the same loop of worthlessness. I tilted my gaze to the giddy bystanders. One finger raised towards them, I pulled the trigger.

Back again, opening my eyes to stare at the ceiling as I sat upright in the bed, and everything was back in its place as more people wandered up and down the halls looking at the other exhibits in this place. Trembling fingers ran through the hair on the right side of my head. I never believed in a god, but this sure felt like hell. I lost track of the days. All I knew is the schedule stayed the same. I never ate, never drank, and never had to use a toilet or felt like I was unclean. Seventeen times had I painted the walls was the only remote indicator of time passing. It had to be once a day, right? Until visiting hours came again, and a girl approached the glass. She sported a baggy, black hoodie with skinny jeans and a black choker.

"What's it like," came her voice after she thumbed the intercom button.

"Living here, or the other thing," I pinched the bridge of my nose, not moving from the chair I sat in.

"Dying," she pressed a hand against the glass.

"Haven't you watched it yet, or is that not real enough for you?" I spun my back towards her.

"I wanted to hear you say

something about it, about how it feels when you press it against your skin and know that you're done. You have to feel something." I glanced over my shoulder. Her eyes held that look that someone gets when they're infatuated. Where the eyes are a tad wide, a corner of the mouth hangs open and the fingers aren't quite sure what they want to do.

"I feel nothing," one foot pushed against the floor to swivel the chair back. "Imagine a hollow, vast, empty feeling that you can't shake." I picked the gun up from the desk, "think of everything you could have ever done wrong and clench it tight right in the center of your chest and envision yourself screaming in your head. Then the voices come echoing, daunting and pleading, trying to reason with you. On the outside, you look dazed, maybe a little spaced out, as if the person you once were is now lost."

"And then what?" she pressed both hands against the glass, and I stood from the chair and started a slow saunter towards the glass.

"Then there is the bright idea that pops up, one that assures you that it can all stop, something to make the pain go away. If you live with it long enough, anything sounds good. So you play with the idea and mull it over and over, until one day you just," I slammed the butt of the gun against the glass, and she jumped while I laughed.

"It's a brave thing, not a whole lot of people have the strength it takes to end their pain. You are like a hero, and inspiration, someone who just did it and never left a note, never told anyone, you just took matters into your own hands. I love that, I wish I could be like you," on the outside her hand traced the outline of my arm.

"Really?"

"Yeah," she stared into my eyes. I nodded my head and weighed the weapon in my hand, and I started firing at

the glass point blank. Watching the bullets lodge themselves into glass one by one until sirens wailed and the room turned red. I enjoyed seeing her jump back from that.

"You're disgusting, you're sick, go get some help you twisted bi—" one of the far walls burst open as three men in full riot gear stormed in, and I turned to fire what was left of the clip at them, laughing with all the manic glee I could feel surging through my veins. I saw the club swinging for my face, and then I saw nothing.

Gasping for air I shot up from the bed and was met once again by the damned wall with people still milling about and mumbling to each other. A few kids took selfies with their backs turned towards my cell. Oh, what a life I now lived.

Time became irrelevant and all the faces were just a blur until I heard a series of taps on the glass, as the intercom came on over the room, "Rise and shine, hope you're decent because I'm coming over anyway." I peeked my head up from the bed to see my friend in his normal attire. Half-laced combat boots, black jeans, and a two kinds of coats with a band t-shirt underneath.

"Long time, no see, man," I pulled myself from the bed and walked towards the glass.

"Only been six days since I was last here. By the way, you missed Christmas. Today is your birthday actually, you would have been twenty-two" He scratched at his nose.

"Six days?" I was taken aback at

that, it had felt like ages had passed, "That's bullshit, I call bullshit. There is no way, I have died almost a hundred times since you last came here. What are they doing, putting a new me in here every four hours or so?" My friend shrugged at me.

"You listed yourself as a donor, the medical field decided you were the best candidate for an attraction. Guess that's the kind of place we live in now." I slumped against the glass and slid down it, my hands clutching fistfuls of hair.

"This can't be real, I never went here, I never wanted to go here, this place, it can't be," I tore my fists from my head and slammed them against the ground, "Am I in hell?" spoke to the ceiling, wondering if anyone could hear me. I turned my eyes back towards my friend who was now sitting on the floor with his back to me. He turned his head, his eyes a little glazed, and he thumbed at his nose and coughed. Like he was trying to keep tears at bay.

"I think this is worse. You ended up being exactly where you didn't want to be with this kind of shit. Used to say how none of this bothered you and that it would be something you could handle. Didn't want to be seen as someone looking for attention or feel like you were hyping up something that wasn't all that bad. Now everyone can see you in your weakest moment, where you gave up on yourself. This isn't hell, this is just a cage with you on display for the world to see."

In Case You Ever Wondered

Edie Gowen

Morning. He woke with a jerk, startled awake by the sound of a door slamming somewhere in the recesses of the house. Beside him in the bed he could feel rather than see the warm, still sleeping form beside him. His girl. She could sleep though a garbage truck barreling through the wall. He, on the other hand, was roused by the smallest of creaking, scratches, and footsteps. It was just his nature. Always on guard. Somebody had to be. And now here he was, lying in the semi-darkness, waiting for his body to catch up with his brain.

His girl. Poor ignorant thing. The only reason she slept as soundly as she did was because she was so dull-witted. She didn't know fear, not real fear. Not like the fear he knew. She wasn't smart enough to know. Much like all of the other people he was surrounded by. People came and went, and he had yet to meet one person who even came close to his own intelligence and self-awareness.

They were all just ignorant fools, living in a fool's paradise, believing they had all of the answers. Buffoons, all of them. It really was amusing, sometimes, to listen to the random idiots prattle on about all of the things they "knew." Fine examples of Darwin's Theory of Evolution... They didn't even seem

to notice the disdain lurking behind his eyes, and if they did, they never said anything. Probably because they knew his intellect to be far superior to theirs and it frightened them.

His girl was the only person he could really tolerate for any length of time. And even she sometimes stretched his good nature to the limits. He had thought so many times of leaving her. Just leaving her where she lay and walking out of the front door of the home they shared. Never to return. No goodbyes, no explanation. She wouldn't understand his explanations anyway, as silly stupid as she was. But something held him there. He was fond of her. And even if she was stupid, she still had her uses. I mean, she was a fine cook and... he had to eat, right? And it was nice to have her in his bed when he needed a body to lay next to. So he stayed. For how much longer he didn't know, but he really was fond of her..

He felt her stretch next to him and his body came alive with her movements. He had so much to do that day, he knew he would have to get an early start, but the first order of business.... a bath. He lifted his leg and purred as he stretched it high and began to lick its length.

A Makeshift Safe Haven

Miranda Mayeaux

I stayed too long. I let you become part of my life when I knew it was wrong. Truth be told, I was scared to let go of you, because at least the pain you caused me is familiar. I don't know what is out there, and it is far easier to hide in your sanctuary of pain than to throw my heart into the unknown. You hurt me, but it's all I've ever known; pain looks like love to me. Maybe I even like my broken heart, for if it were ever to be whole again, what am I to do? This brokenness is who I am, and I can't leave you, because you make me feel at home.



1st Place

Fifteen Minutes with Freaks for Jesus and the Snake Lady

Bruce Craft

"I'd rather take a helluva ass whuppin' than go to a little gurl's damn birthday party!" Can't make up a line so good. It must be experienced, fully throated in all its glory. Such began my fifteen minutes with Freaks for Jesus and the Snake Lady.

The backstory starts after school on Friday afternoon as I picked up my 15-year-old son, Jack, from school. Tired from teaching all week and my teenaged-son perpetually hungry, we agreed to go for burger and cheese fries plates (mine with jalapeños and his without) at our favorite greasy spoon not far from LSU. Usually populated with obligatory college students in search of mass calories to recover from Thirsty Thursday hangovers, a professor-type with a dog-eared and coffee stained copy of Ulysses in tow, a couple of MBA wannabes in power ties, and some high school kids seeking out whatever it is that high school kids seek out on Friday afternoons, last Friday was no different, except in one scene-stealing way. As Jack and I get out of the Jeep, an ear-splitting roar pulls up in the space next to us. Enter Stage Left: Harley Man and Harley Woman. She on the back, arms around his waist, fingers digging hard into the extra twenty or so he wore around the middle as the big bike came to a stop.

Right away, I knew this was it. This had to be it. All week I had been listening, yes eavesdropping, on conversations all over school - students in my classroom, teachers in the lounge, and even our taser-ever-at-the-ready School Resource Officer's encounter with one of our finest in the hallway outside the boy's room where a contact high is always possible. Some had

promise, and my little reporter's notebook (a School Board member gifted us with stenopads at the beginning of the year - really, do teachers ever use stenopads?) was filled with quotations and observations at the ready for my grad school linguistics assignment to analyze a conversation as it occurred. But I knew instantly what rolled up on this fat-tired Harley had to be better than anything I had seen or heard so far. This is it.

The sun reflected off their bright white bike with such brilliance that it was nearly blinding, rays bounced off chrome pipes that seemed as big as those on a Peterbilt, and the whole scene seemed like a cover picture for Biker's World. I started silently singing Bruce Springsteen's "Born to Run." They were right out of Hollywood casting, aging extras who didn't make the final cut in Easy Rider: he in blue jeans with white t-shirt and worn boots and one of those little metal helmets that looked like the steel cap the executioner affixed to the head of the condemned before he threw the switch on Old Sparky; she in a tight pink shirt which showed her off her foray into the plastic surgeon's office years before, completing her self-portrait with studded black leather jacket, black leather pants, and black leather boots that traveled all the way to the crook of her knee. Biker's World meets Leather Porn. When she pulled off her NASA-like helmet, a bouffant of bright red hair jumped out like Lucille Ball popping out of a kid's Jack-in-the-Box toy.

"I'd rather take a helluva ass whuppin' than go to a little gurl's damn birthday party!" Harley Man hollered as he hung his pitiful prison pith helmet on

the handlebar, safe in the knowledge that nobody would steal such ridiculous headwear. As he turned to enter the greasy spoon, I saw it – his call to arms, his advertisement, his name that wasn't a name, tattooed on the back of his neck in a bold script that would make any 16th century Elizabethan court scribe proud: "Freaks for Jesus," quoted in jet black ink surrounded on either side by Golgotha-inspired crucifixes in red which ran all the way up under his pendulous earlobes, and a small American flag positioned perfectly above his Jesus ad at the base of his crew-cut hairline. My mind immediately went into Derridean deconstruction mode merely as a weird theoretical diversion to what I was witnessing, studying his neck as text. Hmmm . . . the red blood of Christ spilling from His stigmata on the Cross, a red-blooded Real American (didn't see a Trump sticker on his bike though), a red-meated He-Man? Maybe all three. But surely not a deacon at the First Baptist Church downtown. The deconstructive possibilities were deep. This was going to be fun.

During the time I spent staring at the back of his neck walking in to the restaurant, somehow she went to the head of the line. I'm sure it had been only seconds, but it seemed much longer in my trance-like state. Silent she had been until now.

Freaks for Jesus' Woman spoke: "Which one, honey?" Her voice, soft and lilting at the end, betrayed her comedic Technicolor hair and leather fetish. The four-pack-a-day growl I had expected did not materialize. My mind quickly reverts to a Robin Lakoff reading assignment on female voice intonation and question tags. Lakoff would love this as much as Jacques Derrida.

"No. 3, same as always." No. 3 was the 'Shroom Burger on the big board. Okay, now images of an aging '60s psilocybin psychedelic stoner fill my mind because Freaks for Jesus clearly had a lot of miles on his odometer. Probably a Vietnam vet, that's what the flag meant. Maybe PTSD led to drug use? Deconstructing his neck again. Picture Harry Crews in the last decade of his

life, not Marlon Brando in *The Wild One*.

"A number three, medium please." She orders for them both. She requests the Classic, medium-well, no cheese, no bacon, dressed but hold the mayo. Wheat bun. Diet Coke. Figures. A feminine order, spoken with the diction and enunciation and clarity of a retired librarian. Did I Love Lucy ever have an episode where Lucy tries to figure out the Dewey Decimal System?

"Regular, hon?" A quick head nod affirmed his beverage choice, no saccharine-laden diet drink for a real man. The young girl at the counter promptly hands over two filled-to-the-brim large plastic red glasses, a shade darker than Mrs. Ball's hairdo but strikingly similar in color to Freaks for Jesus' up-under-the-earlobe cross tattoos.

Jack and I order our regular plates. Much to son's chagrin, I make a bee-line for table right next to Freaks for Jesus and Lucille Ball. Son gives me that "Dad are you crazy?" look, motioning to table across room. I sit down. Son has no choice. I'm holding the little stick with the order number clipped to the top. I put order number stick squarely in front of me so I can continue to deconstruct Holy Roller and Lucy the Librarian without being too obvious.

As yet-to-be-named Harley Woman-slash-Lucille Ball sat down, she took off her leather jacket, with its rows of little chrome-look-alike studs down each sleeve. Must reflect off headlights as a safety feature for the all-in-black biker crowd. As my mind wandered back from the protective features of her jacket, I saw it. There flapping in front of me on a hanging billboard which used to be a toned bicep forty years ago was the name-that-was-not-a-name: a tattoo of a snake, a very big snake, snaking down her right arm, its snake head at her elbow and coiled snake tail at her shoulder. The Snake Lady was born.

"Would you please grab some napkins, baby?" She purred at him in a melodic voice that belied the menacing

pit viper crawling down her arm like a braid escaped from Medusa's bright red head. Did she have a kitten inked on the other arm? Would the snake eat the kitten? I couldn't escape the snake metaphors hissing in my head. Freaks for Jesus grumbled something which was understood in a language only they spoke, got up, and returned with a six-inch stack of brown paper napkins and littered the table with them. Another unintelligible grumble emanated from deep within the white t-shirt. Lakoff was right. Women's question tags, intonation. Take away the leather and the snake and she sounds like a cross between the Church Lady from Saturday Night Live and Elizabeth Taylor from Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.

Stone cold silence. Son now busy texting, so I know I'm safe for the duration to observe. Then the food came, theirs a minute or two ahead of ours. The unspoken conversation between Freaks for Jesus and the Snake Lady began, a symphony of movement from years of rehearsal (I saw that wedding bands adorned their fingers) with the rearrangement of French fries on the plates such that his pile was twice as tall as hers, the choreographed exchange of salt and pepper shakers, her handing him a short stack of napkins from his earlier napkin explosion on the table with a sign language suggestion that he put them in his lap. It was her dinner table away from home. She was in charge. And he knew it. Scared of a snakebite, Freaks for Jesus dutifully unfolded the paper napkin onto his blue jeans, which obviously had seen their share of ketchup (or was it blood? or red hair dye?) spills before. My mind wandered to the etiology of the jean stains while the waitress delivered my heart attack platter.

"It's soooooo juicy, isn't it?" Another grumble shakes loose from underneath the white shirt in quick reply.

What was it that Lakoff said about empty, polite feminine speech patterns? Son now texting with one hand and eating burger with the other. He's gifted. Awkward silence ensues as both tables eat what arguably are the best burgers in Baton Rouge.

"Please." It was a one-word request accompanied by a finger-point to the half of the burger left on the Snake Lady's plate. Freaks for Jesus, well-trained, got up and fetched the little Styrofoam box from the service table on the back wall. I guess that's what those saddlebags are for - transporting leftovers. Lakoff strikes again. Nothing direct. Subtle to the max. Polite. It worked.

Burger box in hand, the Snake Lady pops the question: "It'll be over before you know it. You know she wants to see her Papaw at the party, so we need to drop by. We can go when you want, okay?"

His initial anger subsided, perhaps because the burger fat was now slowing the blood flow through his arteries or maybe due to his wife's polite entreaties, Freaks for Jesus finally spoke in the closest thing he knew to complete and polite sentences: "Awright, come on. Let's get over there before all dem screamin' little gurls get there." She gave him an option, an out, he took it, swallowing the linguistic bait. Hook. Line. And sinker. The Snake Lady let Freaks for Jesus be in charge. Or so he thought.

I watched from the window as Freaks for Jesus and the Snake Lady, dutiful grandparents, hopped back on their steel horse. She packed the leftover box and her leather jacket in the saddlebags. Linguistic ass whuppin' over, Freaks for Jesus revved the pipes and off they roared, earlobes and arm curtains flapping in the wind, to make their granddaughter's day.

2nd Place

Good Old Saint Expedite

Christian Frost

Perhaps because of how vulnerable my Cerebral Palsy sometimes makes me, I've always been attracted to the miraculous and, shall we say "magical" side of Christianity ever since I was young. Stories of saints whose bodies' strength, durability, and resilience matched their faith. This endurance sometimes bordered on comedic because no matter how many people the saint converted with their dedication in the face of death, the executioners stubbornly stuck to both their mission and their method of execution. The fire refuses to burn your virgin martyr after she's thrown in? Just make it hotter. Her head refuse to come off when you try to behead her? Eh, just give it a few more whacks. Her body is frozen in a pose of devotion that she seemingly cannot be forced out of? Hear me out, I've got a brilliant suggestion: how bout we get two more soldiers to try and pull her out the pose, it's got to work this time! Healing stories had an impact on me also – even now the almost neon blue waters of Lourdes where the disabled are supposed to be cured bob before my mind. This taste for the miraculous and magical was only fueled further when I read The Golden Legend, a medieval collection of stories about saints, which, unlike more modern books didn't let a little thing like fear of being called "scientifically impossible" stop it from telling a compelling narrative. In its pages, St. Patrick dives to the bottom of a miles-deep lake to fight Satan's mother, and St. Martha tames a giant lion-ox-lizard hybrid by singing it Christian hymns. I loved strange and surreal tales like this because they painted the world as full of spirits and magic and thus even more dependent on God's intervention to keep this dynamism under control and running smoothly. However, as I grew older I began to grow wary of this view. Sure, summoning a jinni would be excellent for converting

people by giving them a tangible sign of God's magnificent creative power, but enter the term "jinn" or "jinn magic" and you'll be flooded with offers to teach you how to use jinn to curse your enemies or find treasure to get rich. Similarly, while it's nice to think that you might have some of your sins overlooked due to your devotion to the sacraments or the veneration of a certain saint, it turns sour when you hear the story of how a career thief was able to get into heaven despite having no heavenly qualifications aside from St. Joseph giving him thumbs up for the altars the thief dedicated to him. It is the conflict between my love of the miraculous and my trepidation of the behaviors it might encourage that defies my feeling on St. Expedite.

While I'm leerier about the veneration of saints than I was when I was younger, I still have a few statues and prayer cards for good luck as well as to remind me of their example. As a consummate procrastinator, you can see why I'd be attract to the saint for curing procrastination, St. Expedius. The story goes that he was a Roman centurion during the final Christian prosecution under Diocletian; he was trying to decide whether he should disobey orders and become a Christian. He was deep in thought when the devil appeared as a crow and said, "Eh. Just do it tomorrow." Expedius turned, curb stomped the bird and said, "I will be a Christian today," and was beheaded for his faith. I thought this was a beautiful and edifying story, so I went online to find out more. The first result was, "Get big money with the aid of St. Expedius!" All the upside down smiley emojis in the world couldn't express my feelings when I read that.

You see, there's another origin story for Saint Expedius that I didn't tell you because it's stupid. During the French

Revolution some priests gathered their statues (in some tellings they ship the bones of a certain saint) to a Louisiana convent where they'd be safe from the anti-Catholic violence in France. They marked this crate Expedite. Now the nuns, not being the brightest candles on the altar, assumed when they got it that Expedite referred to the saint whose statue or bones were inside. Silly nuns! Everyone knows expedite is a command not a name. It means, "speed me along" you sillies! As corny as this story is, "speed me along," is basically the motto of the folk saint Expedite (the name is something of a sore spot among mainstream Catholic priests who insist on calling him Expedius, partially to separate him from the outrageous claims of his folk counterpart). Being a saint of dubious legality, (the second Vatican council removed him from the main feast calendar due to a lack of evidence that a martyr called Expedius ever existed) people ask him for all kinds of stuff they probably wouldn't ask Mary or Joseph for intercession with. Gambling prowess, keeping the law off you and even black magic curses, St. Expedite does them all with a smile, and so prompt, too! All he asks in return is a bit of pound cake on his altar, (neither friend nor enemy of St. Expedite could tell me why he's so crazy about pound cake) and a bit of white rum if you have any (that offering is connected to the traditional offerings made to the voodoo spirits of the dead, more on that later). So famous is he for his prompt service, some people decapitate his altar statues for not performing the tasks assigned to him quick enough. One imagines good old St. Expedite still smiles as his head falls to the ground after being impatiently cut.

His good nature is even more exaggerated in Louisiana Folk Catholicism. Due to his statue being in Saint Jude's Church (the only statue of St. Expedite in America) he is considered a saint of overcoming impossible obstacles like Saint Jude is. The similarities don't end there; like saint Jude, he was martyred through beheading. As such, both saints are said to be dimwits due to "not having a good head on their

shoulders." Get it!? Call me cynical, but I can see why it might be to people's advantage that the two saints in charge of helping people overcome impossible odds are two absent-minded, overly agreeable, push overs. However, this absent mindedness can come back to bite you. You must be very specific in your requests. If you just say, "St. Expedite, give me big money now!" He'll say, "Duhh... Ok!" and put you in a car wreck faster than you can say, "Sarah Lee's Always Fresh Pound Cake." But hey, at least you'll get "big money" from that settlement you'll be receiving. It's also a bad idea to give him his pound cake before the task is complete; he'll take the offer and leave you with nothing. Also, it's a good idea to invoke other saints behind him to remind him of his task to make sure he completes his task and doesn't lose his head. It isn't attached anymore, after all. Also, like for St. Jude, it's customary to put a notice in the paper thanking the saint for his help. In St. Jude's case, this is to help make sure people don't confuse him for the villainous apostle Judas. In St. Expedite's case, like so many other things about dealing with the saint, it's "just because." Because why wouldn't you recommend such a cosmic bungler's aid to your friends?

Expedite has a darker side however. In Louisiana Voodoo, he's sometimes counted among the spirits of the dead, the Ghede, and often invoked in black magic. Saint Expedite's can do attitude and willingness to do just about anything becomes a lot less nice when his task is ensuring death. Often a slaughtered crow is also given as a kind of calling card and prelude to the violence he's called to do. A mercenary and expert circumventer of spiritual bureaucracy, he waltzes right up to the king of the dead, Baron Samedi, and attempts to cajole him into okaying the murder. The Baron, to his credit, is a lot less cavalier about murder and often needs a lot of convincing. One can imagine him elbowing the Baron as they toss back the ceremonial white rum. "C'mon, boss! Let's ice this joker! These nice fellas gave me some high quality pound cake to work this deal!"

Saint Expedite is always smiling but that smile can range from a dreamy grin to a sardonic smirk.

So, if I have accused Saint Expedius in his various interpretations of being a pushover, an idiot, and a mercenary, why do I have his statue in my collection? One, he's a quintessential New Orleans figure, a combination of eye-rolling superstition and earnest hope for protection against bad times, which I can empathize

with. Two, I appreciate his seeming good sense of humor and willingness to be the butt of a joke (that sometimes turns back around on you, remember his supposed willingness to take his offering without doing his share). Finally, he is thought to be the saint of students who face important tests, and with finals coming up... Well... an essay is as good as a newspaper article about him, right?

3rd Place

Now You're Speaking My Language

Ashante Knox

When I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, it was like learning that I would no longer hear. It was like I was deaf and I had to learn sign language. Of course, the reality of this did not hit me instantly; when it did, it was sudden and like an eighteen-wheeler had rear-ended me at an intersection. I know this may seem a bit melodramatic, but let me allow you into my head where finally, I can teach you my language.

I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder around the age of fifteen. I was confused, angry even because I wouldn't allow myself to believe that something could be wrong with me. (This is what I believed at the time- that something was wrong with me. If it were not for the many people who encouraged me throughout the years, I would probably still believe it). I am not crazy, is what I tried to reason with the doctors, I'm just going through a lot. The reality is that I do have bipolar disorder which is also known as manic depression. I also had no idea just how rough my rollercoaster ride was about to be.

Before you are diagnosed with something permanent, you believe all of your problems are temporary. The crying will go away, the anger, the sadness will go away...but they don't. When they aren't going away, you try to reason with yourself that maybe what you are dealing with takes time but it will eventually go away. Once you are diagnosed with something like bipolar disorder, the reality hits you. This isn't going to just go away. This is permanent. And now I have to learn how to deal with this effectively. Like a deaf person, I have to learn this new language. I have to learn how to recognize when I am having an episode. I have to remind myself to take medicines that I don't like. I have to understand that everyone wants to understand and not

many people will, no matter how much they want to. Now, I have to teach them—if they want to learn—what it means to have a mental illness.

I had to learn myself. I had to learn who I was as this person with a mental illness; I had to learn that I am not her at all. I am not a person with a mental illness, I am just a person who happens to have a mental illness. But at the time, I could not separate these two variables. At the time, all I could see was through my "bipolar lens."

I believe I suffered from the "stages of grief." I had denial, depression, anger, bargaining, etc. I could not live with the fact that now all of my problems were seemingly permanent. This affected me so severely, I ended up in a mental institution because of a suicide attempt. I thought I'd be surrounded by "crazy people." Imagine my surprise when they all looked like me. They looked normal. They were all normal. It was nothing like I had seen in the movies. There were girls my age who had normal issues like mine. They may have suffered from a disorder like schizophrenia or anxiety, but they were no different than me. At fifteen, I couldn't believe it. They were like me. Maybe I wasn't so crazy after all.

I faced a lot of insecurities as I aged. I wondered if people could tell that I was "different." I wondered, "If I tell them, would that make them not like me?" I wanted to tell people. It would be a weight off of my shoulders. If I tell them why I'm so moody all the time, then they'd understand. But when the depression would hit, I had no one to turn to. No one could understand why I'd be bombarded with sadness every two weeks. I could barely understand myself, how could I make anyone else understand? This was a foreign language to me, and possibly an unknown language to everyone else.

There are those in America and those in Britain who speak English. For the most part, they can understand each other but, they have different slang. A biscuit in Britain and America are two different things. Bipolar disorder for you and I, may be different. I am not saying that having bipolar disorder is an ailment and I am wounded. Honestly, I believe bipolar disorder is my blessing.

I'm going to get religious for a second: God gives us many gifts. This is a true statement. Bad things happen in the world. This is also a true statement. For as long as there is bad in the world, bad things will happen. For as long as there is good in the world, good things will happen. God takes bad things and turns them around for His good (this is my personal belief). Bipolar disorder is my version of His good. I could be dead from suicide. I could be out of my mind and unable to write this. But I am alive, with peace of mind, and a gift I wasn't even aware that I had anymore. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at fifteen; I am almost twenty and I am a completely different person now.

For the longest time I asked God, "Why me?" and I believed he never answered. Now, I believe that it is because I had to understand in the language he had given me. "Why you?" you may ask. It is because I am an advocate. I am a psychology major at NSU because I am bipolar. I love to write, because I am bipolar. I am creative, funny, and a burst of energy because I am bipolar. Yes, I struggle, cry, and deal with everything that comes along with having a mental illness, but I can handle it just as others like me have learned to. I have learned my language. I am not crippled, I am not broken. I am an advocate for many others who speak the same language as me. Yes it is hard. I am not healed. I am me and I will continue to have bipolar disorder for the rest of my life. But I will not let it have me for the rest of my life.

A lot of people say that they "fight" mental illness. Although yes, it is a battle, I hate to call it a fight. Fighting means you can lose. I believe that I have made peace with my mental illness. You can't lose if there's no fight to win. I am living. And for the first time in a long time, I am happy. I would not be who I am, if I did not have bipolar disorder. I may not have been so creative or so sympathetic towards others, or so understanding. Bipolar disorder may have disabled me in some ways but it made it possible for me to use it in a way that could be productive. For example, when I am manic, I get a lot of homework done.

I have always wanted to tell my story. I have always wanted someone to understand my language. I've always wanted to just say "I am bipolar" as easy as someone says "I have diabetes" or "I have arthritis." I may be disabled, but I am not permanently "unable." I hope a lot of people learn to understand this. There are so many like me who want to speak out, and I would like to be the vessel for them to do so.

So, let's imagine you are at the park and it's a beautiful sunny day. Suddenly, it begins to pour. Lighting and thunder is seen and heard everywhere and you don't have an umbrella. The weather man didn't say it was going to rain. It rains for days and then just as before, it suddenly stops. The birds are chirping and the ground is completely dry. You see your neighbor and you ask him, "Wow, that storm was crazy, huh?" Your neighbor looks at you puzzled. "It hasn't rained all week." Confused, you notice only you could see the storm. Now imagine that happened every two weeks or every other month. That would be pretty hectic, right?

Now you're speaking my language.

Honorable Mention

Why My Son Won't Eat With Me at La Morenita Anymore, or Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid

Bruce Craft

With my gray slacks, blue blazer and coral-colored Polo smartly buttoned all the way up to the top, I stood out from the painters, roofers, and landscapers in the buffet line at La Morenita. But that wasn't the only dead giveaway to my status as a foreigner in the land of the ensalada de pulpo that reached out to me from the cold steel pan of the cafeteria cart. A buzz saw of unintelligible Español ricocheted off the walls, a cacophony delivered at light speed between a hungry house painter and the Guatemalan octogenarian behind the counter taking orders and filling plates. I know she's Guatemalan only because I teach her great grandson, who works here after school, hence my introduction to this original-of-all-originals Mexican and Central American market and food joint, tucked away in a former Sav-A-Lot next to the now closed Office Depot in a part of town sane people avoid after nightfall and the old blue-haired church ladies avoid all day long. Not a single fifty-mile-per-hour passerby would notice the shopping center's nearly abandoned status given the hundred or so cars piled in the potholed parking lot. We gathered to sample La Morenita's big buffet, hopping quickly out of our cars like starving Baptists trying to beat the Methodists to the roast beef at the Piccadilly on Sundays at noon. Word-of-mouth advertising, the only kind this place gets, says it's the best \$5.99 you've ever spent. Drinks are extra, purchased in the attached grocery store, where you can also buy exotic-looking produce that the BMW drivers at Whole Foods across town see only when they fly to Costa Rica for a long weekend. One half expects a crazed

chicken to escape the butcher shop in the back and run across the floor toward the front door and freedom, with Hector and his hatchet in hot pursuit. It's so authentic in here, as my teenaged son said on his first visit a few months ago, even the cockroaches must speak Spanish.

With the refrain of La Cucaracha echoing in my head and my nose already running from the habaneros hidden in the sauce bubbling in the misshapen and stained stock pot on the old Maytag stove in the corner under a dilapidated box fan that looks like it came from a surplus sale at the state pen, I dutifully wait in line with my always starving son to place our orders, giving a big thumbs-up salute to my hardworking student (thinking immediately after I did it that such a Trump-esque gesture might be ill-received in my present environs) whom I see in the back loading up a counter-full of rice cookers, getting ready for the after-work onslaught of construction workers who roll in here packed eight or ten tight in a half-dozen F-150 crew cabs every day when the boss-man calls quittin' time.

The painter in front of us finally gets his plate—a Styrofoam box filled so high that he can't close the lid—and we approach the wrinkled Guatemalan grandma, who at about 4'7" talks to our navels through the open space between the bottom of the sneeze bar and the top of the enchilada pan. Her rapid-fire Spanish sounds like an AK-47 being shot with a full clip, so we simply assume she is asking us what we want. All has gone well so far. Son—who will eat Mexican food for breakfast if you let him—

has yet to feel the usual embarrassment of being around Dad, his afterschool hunger probably so severe that it blocks out all other thoughts. Of course, all of that is about to change.

Son engages in the tried-and-true method of communicating when you don't speak the native tongue—simply point. He extends left index finger in the direction of the tacos. Grandma nods. Then he holds up three fingers and gestures toward the flour tortillas, silently signaling three soft tacos. Grandma nods. Then he points to the shredded beef and cheese. Grandma nods again. Grandma then points to the homemade pico de gallo and rows of other condiments. Son—not a picky eater but surely a simple one—waves off anything else and takes his box of three soft tacos with meat and cheese only from the smiling octogenarian. The only words which emanated from the entire event were the ones son was texting to one of his Snapchat friends as his right thumb never left his phone screen while ordering his food. I guess son is gifted, a left-handed Spanish sign language interpreter.

Grandma then turns to my navel through the bottom of the sneeze bar glass. Eager to impress even gray-haired Guatemalans with my decidedly limited Spanish speaking ability—learned hit and miss from lunches in the teacher lounge with the Spanish teacher at my school and from attempts to communicate with my growing Hispanic student population—I loudly and proudly proclaim in my best George Lopez television accent: “Me gustaría un polla grande por favor.” Upon the first utterance of Spanish from my lips, son smartly makes a beeline for the cash register, leaving me to handle whatever linguistic mess I was going to make solo. I thought Grandma would smile at my hearty and heartfelt efforts to speak her tongue and spoon into my box the largest and most succulent of the chicken quarters that I hungrily spied swimming in a pan of sauce verde. What happened clearly defeated my modest expectations.

Grandma took her big metal

spoon and slammed it down on the metal edge of the buffet. I guess the wheels weren't locked and the whole apparatus moved about a foot to the left. It sounded like a hand grenade going off, with the slamming spoon and the screeching wheels and the shrieking in Spanish from the little grandmother who suddenly morphed into a cross between a Chihuahua and a Pit Bull. The patrons in line behind me—all grown men—giggled like school girls and scattered like somebody kicked their ant pile.

(Suddenly I felt like I was in a really bad B-movie, you know the type where the camera slowly pans out to a wide angle to show the helpless lead character all alone, hopelessly unaware that he is about to meet his maker. Time stood still....)

A quick glance to my left reveals son with head down, texting away, probably asking a friend to come get him so he doesn't have to ride in the ambulance with me. At any rate, he is rapidly inventing a new identity separate from mine for self-preservation purposes. After my forever moment—during which time I contemplated whether there were butcher knives behind the buffet cart—elapsed after about a second-and-a-half, I noticed five hairy knuckles passing a Styrofoam box over the top of the still-shaking buffet to me. I mumbled some weird hybrid of “gracias” and “thank you” to him and with eyes averted made a mad dash to the cash register where son waited, dutifully allying himself with me only because I had the money. Grandma had simply vanished, like Endora snapping her fingers and disappearing from the TV screen in one of those old Bewitched episodes. “Can’t we eat this in the car, Dad?” I gestured to the wooden picnic tables behind us, figuring that pointing definitely had its benefits here. I whispered: “No, let’s sit over here. Want some dessert, too?” I opened my box and saw that the hairy hand had helped me to a plate of enchiladas in red sauce. Well, I probably didn’t want the chicken now anyway. Confused about what had happened and about as nervous as a poker playing cowboy with his back

to the saloon door, I choked down my enchiladas—and yes, they were some of the best I'd ever had—and noticed that son inhaled three tacos in less than a minute with left hand while texting at warp speed with right, probably telling his five hundred closest friends how dear old Dad nearly got killed by a Guatemalan midget.

"Dad, can you eat faster? Let's go."

Before I could swallow my last bite of enchilada bathed in hotter-than-hell sauce, my student walked up, somewhat sheepishly. "Hey, Mr. Craft, glad you came to eat here again."

"What's the deal with your grandmother getting mad and all those guys laughing at me? What happened? I was just trying to be nice and talk to her so that she could understand me without being rude and pointing at the food."

"Well, Mr. Craft, you said you wanted polla. The Spanish word for chicken is pollo."

Thinking perhaps that I had ordered asparagus or something by mistake, I shrugged and offered somewhat

apologetically, "OK, so what did I ask for instead?"

By now gifted son has stopped texting and logged into Google Translate on his phone and begins to laugh so hard I think he may need to be hospitalized. As if some secret teenage code exists, my student joins him, both cackling like hysterical hyenas at a kill. Dumbfounded, I grab son's phone and look at his screen. There it is in all of its OMG and LMAO glory: polla means "cock" in Spanish—defined not as a male bird but rather a vulgar reference to the male anatomy. Yes, I had loudly, purposefully, and with a straight-faced smile told an elderly grandmother in front of a dozen construction workers that I wanted a big cock.

A few days after my epic failure at cross-cultural communication, my son finally stopped laughing and said he wanted some Mexican food. I suggested La Morenita. "No, Dad, let's just drive through Taco Bell. You can read the menu in English there." 'Nuff said.

Several Feet Tall

Katie Rayburn

She was only five feet. In my mind, I rationally understood that and the fact that I was taller than her. However, while sitting on the tiny step stool with my knees propped up in front of me and my neck bent upward uncomfortably, I thought for a moment that she must be several feet tall. She had to be, with the way she spoke and handled herself as she washed each dish vigorously and with care. She wore bright colored gloves to protect her hands but mainly her left hand, fourth finger. There is value in skin care and metals with gems, but emotional value outweighs all.

Then, here I sat, thinking as she spoke, that this woman was so tall. I was gazing up towards strength and composure, courage and resilience, elegance and compassion. All of those things and more built upon inch after inch of trials of emotions and expectations by others and herself. She dressed for success no matter the day; wearing a perfume of perfection, a dress of dedication, and a necklace to pull the whole outfit together. Putting her heart into everything isn't enough for her either; she has to put her mind, body, and soul into it as well. She balances the world in both hands while still taking time to make hot chocolate with the rainbow marshmallows for her friend. To me, she was several feet tall and incapable of falling down.

Yet here she was, telling me all the things she is dealing with, what she is afraid of, and asking me questions I know she doesn't actually want answers to. I let her talk out loud all the things she is saying in her own head, waiting until she finishes a complete thought to speak if necessary. It rarely is. She just wants someone to listen

and to assure her.

How can I? How can you tell someone that everything is going to be alright? How can you make them believe it? You can't, unfortunately; and to tell them everything will be alright is just an outright lie. Instead, you let them speak, because in the end they usually already know the answers to their questions. They just need someone else to listen and confirm. However, there is one question she asks that I cannot answer. She worries about travelling too far down the wrong path, and part of me wants to laugh. So many people wonder this. But how can you answer them?

It took a few minutes, the sound of hot water obliterating the leftover, caked-on food from the day-old dinner plate filled the air. Odd that a plate was left overnight in her sink, but it suggests just how upset she is. I let the steam blur everything as the answer sits in the back of my head, waiting for me to wipe my hand across the mirror in my mind and reveal it clearly. It's another one of those answers no one wants to hear, and it may not help at all. But she turns off the water, looking to me for an answer, and the steam fades away.

"Wrong path, right path; there is only one path we can take. We can't go back so we move forward, and that's the only one we have. So it's the right one, the only one, and the happiest one," I say all at once, so it comes out awkwardly. I don't look up for a moment, too embarrassed by the cliché. I was never one for emotions and all that nonsense. But I think it may be what she needs right now. Not a hug. Not a cup of hot chocolate with rainbow marshmallows. Just for someone to say that

everything may not be alright—how can it when life is about tackling one thing after another—but that no matter what, as long as she believes in the way she is walking, then everything is going to turn out just the way it is meant to. What else can I say?

I finally glance up, and for a millionth of a second, she looks five feet again, worried and questioning and shrunk inside herself. But no! I blink, and the several feet tall woman stands in front of me again, confident once more, and all is right in the world as long as she is standing. She thanks

me for listening, for some of the advice I gave her, and then she starts talking about how she wants to be married. She wants to be with her husband already and living her life. And you can see it in her eyes, the happiness she gets from thinking about him and their future. And I worry just a little less. For everything that builds her up so high, I forgot the most important thing. Here was a woman several feet tall, standing on commitment and wisdom, on sturdy ground and resilience, and on the support of those around her along with the love she radiates back into this world.

